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THE NEW J. B. PRIESTLEY: A Xmas Letter

STATESMAN AND NATION

The Week-end Review

Vol. XXXII. No. 826. [Incorporating THE ATHENÆUM] SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1946 [Registered at the G.P.O. as a newspaper] SIXPENCE

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BITS AND PIECES OF GOOD WILL

IT would be pleasant to write that the United Nations were celebrating "the feast of friends" in the true spirit of seasonal good will. Pleasant, but not quite realistic. The Assembly, indeed, dispersed from Lake Success in an atmosphere of outward harmony, with M. Spaak in the role of Santa Claus distributing neatly wrapped-up presents of Resolutions to the taste, more or less, of each departing Delegation. But the underlying international stresses and strains have clearly not yet been wholly resolved: enduring "peace on earth" is still a hope rather than an accomplishment. What can be said is that, during their stay in the United States, the Council of Foreign Ministers and the Assembly have between them dressed and decorated a diplomatic Christmas tree of sorts; and if some of the decorations do not bear too close inspection, let us at least be grateful for signs of good will.

The Foreign Ministers can certainly claim that they have succeeded where many thought they would fail: they have constructed the Satellites' peace treaties and have shown that it is possible to compromise. The joinery is perhaps imperfect: bits of the structure fit none too well, and there has been a tendency to shelve a number of vital questions for later settlement. For example, the fate of the Italian Colonies has yet to be decided; the choice of a Governor for the Free Territory of Trieste is likely to cause a hard tussle; and there is a big question mark still left over the future of navigation and commerce on the Danube (which is to be discussed at a later Conference) and over the sums (still unfixed) which the defeated ex-enemy countries are to pay by way of restitution for damage done to business interests. Italy and Hungary, too, may protest that the bill for reparations with which they are now presented is hardly the sort of present that one expects from Santa Claus. Nevertheless, the world will welcome these treaties as a recognition by the Great Powers that it is more important to declare peace than to try to squeeze out the last ounce of strategic advantage from an intolerably prolonged state of armistice.

Equally welcome is the fact that the Assembly, thanks largely to the chairmanship of M. Spaak, ended by passing a Resolution which puts on record the nations' will to have controlled disarmament. This question did not figure on the Assembly's original agenda, and cynics may be tempted to argue that the final resolution was simply an ingenious way of avoiding any immediate action and of extracting the British delegation from the embarrassing position in which Sir Hartley Shawcross had somewhat impetuously placed it.

The prelude, in fact, had been a series of tactical moves following the Russian demand for a disclosure of the strength of forces maintained by the Powers outside their own territories. To this demand the Americans had at first no objection; but the British, realising that Mr. Molotov was hoping to extract material for propaganda against British policy in Greece and the Middle East, retorted by a demand that the disclosure should extend also to metropolitan forces. This gave the Russians an opportunity to argue, plausibly enough, that if it was to be a question of disclosure of "total" strength, then armaments—not excluding atomic bombs—must come into the reckoning. At this point the American spokesman began to talk about the need for a "general disarmament scheme" to precede such disclosure; and the British delegation countered Mr. Molotov with the proposal (which they doubtless believed the Russians would reject) that any comprehensive census both of personnel and materials must be subject to verification by a Commission of Inspection.

There followed a lightning *riposte* by Mr. Molotov. Russia would agree to inspection: would that satisfy the British? Yes, said Sir Hartley, with the haste born of the belief that, at the last minute, the Russians had given in. Next morning brought realisation that the British had verbally committed their American friends to accepting an immediate inspection of atom bomb factories. What Mr. Byrnes said to Mr. Bevin, or Mr. Bevin to Sir Hartley Shawcross, has not been published. History merely records that there was intense diplomatic activity, and that M. Spaak produced, and persuaded the Assembly unanimously to adopt, a Resolution which calls for an early general regulation and reduction of armaments, asks the Security Council to formulate practical measures to that end, expresses the view that the atom bomb should be outlawed, and urges the Security Council to accelerate the establishment of United Nations Armed Forces to preserve world security.

"This is where we came in" may be the comment of those who recall the good intentions of the League and the sorry ending to all the attempts made under its ægis to work out practical disarmament schemes. The Russians have not got the immediate census of overseas Forces which they wanted. How far along the road to peace does the omnibus Resolution which they got instead carry us? If words mean anything, a long way. The Security Council now has a definite mandate; and, though Big Power unanimity will still be required before an agreed scheme can be put to the Assembly, the principle now seems to be accepted that inspection is not to be subject to veto, though it is not clear whether the veto can be invoked to prevent sanctions against breaches of any convention which may emerge. Here, too, as in the case of the Satellite Treaties, there are loose ends. But at least the trend is in the right direction: the Assembly has plainly asked the Big Powers to turn their minds from thoughts of the next war to seeing if future recourse to arms cannot be avoided altogether. Will they listen? Not wholeheartedly, perhaps, until more has been done to create, in Europe, conditions in which there is greater confidence in political stability. So long as "cold war" is still levied over the prostrate body of Germany there will be no real peace and no sincere will to disarm. It is at least encouraging that the Big Four should now have agreed, not merely that an early Peace Treaty with Austria is needed, but that the problem of Germany should be debated in the Spring on the basis of an arranged agenda.

Deadlock in France

The new French Government is at best an enforced expedient. Though M. Blum, recalled from retirement, and his unhappy Socialist colleagues have found a temporary solution by forming an administration to hold the fort until the constitutional regime is inaugurated in five weeks' time, the failure of the main parties to reach agreement is a bad augury. If it was impossible to break the deadlock in the last two weeks, how can it be broken in the New Year? The even balance of Left and Right was a serious problem in the period of provisional government, when a coalition was accepted as inevitable. But neither the Communists nor the M.R.P. want any more of their uneasy partnership. Each side seeks power, and insists that its opponents are incapable of checking the rapid drift towards financial catastrophe. M. Herriot and his followers, who hold the casting vote, will not give it to a coalition dominated by the Communists, nor will they enter a government formed exclusively by the M.R.P. and the extreme Right. Although the Communists moderated their opposition to working with the M.R.P. in the hope that this would help M. Blum to form a broad stop-gap Cabinet, they still refused to abandon their claim to one of the key Ministries, and only the Socialists were prepared to concede this. The recent elections, it now appears, have settled nothing in France. The Fourth Republic has begun its career by choosing as Prime Minister an aged politician who does not even belong to the Assembly. Unless either of the two main groups can win over the Radicals before M. Blum has to resign, an unstable coalition may be the only choice for the Assembly. This deadlock helps nobody except de Gaulle, who will claim that his jeremiad seems to be coming true, and that, if democratic parties cannot prevent chaos, a strong man must once more be called upon to save France.

The Monnet Plan

The economic problems which confront France are much wider than the task (which M. Philip will essay) of "saving the franc" by balancing the Budget through a policy of retrenchment. The plan drawn up by M. Monnet shows that the French face problems of economic rehabilitation fully as difficult as ours. Their plant is in much worse condition, and they have suffered more extensive industrial war damage. According to M. Monnet's estimates, which are well supported by figures standing for indisputable facts, the French nation needs to devote to investment in capital goods of one sort or another practically a quarter of its present national income, and to go on doing this for a number of years. The proportion of output to be withdrawn from current consumption can be reduced only if the national income is increased at once. Hence, the proposal to give up the forty-hour-week introduced under the *Cartel des Gauches* before the war and to go back to the forty-eight hour week. The Monnet Plan calls for a strict control over both capital investment and consumption; for without this, it will be impossible either to secure the required volume of investment or to direct it to the key industries and services, as the Plan demands. It therefore requires firm dealing with all the black markets, and with the peasants, as well as strong public control over all industries in order to prevent profiteering, and over the key industries in order to guide development along the right lines. It is, in effect, the sort of Plan that a really strong and well-established Government might put into effect, even in France; but it is highly unrealistic to suppose that it could be carried out by any kind of weak coalition. The Communists, who lead the Trade Unions, have already accepted the Plan in general, including the longer working week. The Right, and the Radicals, will accept the longer working week with alacrity, but will reject the controls. The M.R.P. will be divided on this as on most issues; the Socialists will presumably accept. If France cannot find a Government capable of acting on the Monnet Plan, her economic future will not be very different from the pastoralisation planned for her under Hitler and the Vichy regime.

Socialism in Germany

The statement in the *Observer* that Mr. Bevin, under American pressure, requested the Cabinet to delay the first move in the socialization plan for the British Zone, was swiftly followed by a Foreign Office denial. We have reason to believe that Mr. Bevin, while expressing agreement with the Prime Minister on the need to push on with the announced nationalization programme, explained that he was anxious not to provoke hostile American reaction by making too much song and dance about the first step, the appointment of custodians. The State Department knows perfectly well that any other policy is impracticable in Germany, but, in deference to American public opinion, and aware of the conservative majorities in Bavaria and Wurtemberg, Mr. Byrnes has stated that socialization must not be imposed against the will of the majority, and "must be carried out by normal democratic processes." As so often American foreign policy is an uneasy compromise between pressure of domestic prejudices and national interests. Congress is unwilling to provide money, part of which, under the Anglo-American fusion plan, will go towards the cost of setting a socialized German industry on its feet. This only confirms our doubts about the practicability of "fusion." Socialization cannot be carried on *sub rosa*, and the fusion will break down if it is to be interpreted in different ways in Congress and in Parliament. If the differences on this key issue were so great that they could not be ironed out before the agreement was signed we might have been better off with no agreement at all.

The Persian Tangle

The entry of Persian troops into Azerbaijan and the suppression of the semi-autonomous regime mark the end of an uneasy truce. The Prime Minister, Gawam-es-Sultaneh, who has always been more of an adventurer than a democrat, has now turned against the popular and pro-Soviet movement that carried him to power. Whatever his personal motives for this change, it tilts the balance of Persian politics away from Russia and in favour of Anglo-American interests. Gawam has clearly outmanoeuvred the Tudeh Party and its allies, who formed a united front some weeks ago; and they have now declared that they will boycott the forthcoming elections for the Majlis. A paper victory is thus certain for the Democratic Party of Iran, in which Gawam is supported by a mixed collection of careerists and reactionaries. The Tudeh leaders realised too late that Gawam was using their participation in the Cabinet as a screen behind which he could prepare this present *volte-face*. When they withdrew, Gawam had already built his own party machine, concluded an alliance with the Right, and made his plans for liquidating the Azerbaijan regime. It seems likely that he will now launch an open campaign against all the opposition parties and against the large industrial and peasant unions which are under Tudeh leadership. There were signs that this had actually started before he ordered the Persian Army to move on Tabriz. It is possible that the Left may now have to choose between piecemeal destruction of its forces and active resistance. Although it has lost the tactical advantage it possessed earlier this year, the coalition based on Tudeh still enjoys widespread support, not only among the workers, but also in the Civil Service, the Army and the national minorities. If a revolutionary crisis develops, it should be remembered that the opposing groups are not mere puppets of foreign Powers, but are also the reflection of conflicting social forces in Persia. As in other countries of the Middle East, it is dangerous to claim the landlords and a corrupt ruling class as reliable friends of Britain and democracy.

The Indian Republic

Little that was positive resulted from the two days' debate in the Commons on India. Mr. Churchill, from whose attitude two influential Tory speakers dissented, failed in his efforts to trap the Government into a declaration that it would regard the work of the Constituent Assembly as invalid if the Muslim League maintained its boycott. That would be to place an all-powerful weapon in Mr. Jinnah's hands. The Assembly, with the 70 Muslim Leaguers absent, has elected Dr. Rajendra Prasad its President. A good choice; for his is a conciliatory personality and as Food Member in the Interim Government he has done well. The first important business was the debate on Nehru's resolution—now blessed by Gandhi. He made a friendly appeal to the Muslim League to come in. It declares that the Assembly is resolved to proclaim India an independent, sovereign Republic. This is a statement of intention only, and will not be a part of the Constitution. The veteran Dr. Jayakar is, none the less, asking for its postponement as a gesture of conciliation towards the Muslim League, which ought to be present when it is discussed. Some of the States, not yet represented in the Assembly, are also restive, though Nehru made it clear that a Republican Indian Union can include States which retain their princes. A graver issue was raised, not for the first time, in Nehru's speech at Benares, with its claim that the Assembly is fully sovereign and can take what decision it will, "whether Britain accepts it or not." This is not the official view prevailing in Whitehall, but we fail to see how any Socialist or any democrat can question it. The Assembly, newly elected by a very fair procedure, is the embodiment of the Indian people's sovereignty. The sovereignty of the King-Emperor rests only on the right of conquest. The League's wilful absence cannot invalidate the work of the Assembly. Protected as it is by the rule that a majority of both communities is required for the decision of any "major communal issue" it has no reasonable ground for its fear of Hindu members. What will be the effect of its abstention is that the provinces it controls cannot be coerced into the Indian Union. It can in this way force the recognition of Pakistan—with the thorny problems of its frontiers still to settle. On this, judging from his latest statements, Mr. Jinnah seems to be determined.

Mr. Bevan and the Doctors

In face of the doctors' decision not to negotiate on the terms laid down in the National Health Act, Mr. Aneurin Bevan has to decide what to do next. He has the knowledge that the B.M.A.'s decision was made by a majority of only a few thousands, and that a large minority among the medical profession is unconvinced by the assertion that doctors stand to lose their professional freedom under the terms of the Act; but, as against this, the majority is larger among G.P.s than among other groups (except consultants), and it is upon the G.P.s that the main part of the new Health Service is bound to depend. So many concessions have already been made to the doctors in the course of the discussions which preceded the passing of the Act that the plan approved by Parliament is now workable only on a basis of mutual co-operation. One possible course is to rely on enough doctors coming in, when the choice has to be made, to give the scheme a sufficient basis. In the last resort this is what will have to be done, and there is little doubt that it can be done if the B.M.A. persists in its intransigence to the end. It is, however, very much to be hoped that the need for an outright battle with the organised doctors will be avoided. It is not easy for laymen to see

what real grievances remain, on the score of professional freedom, in face of the large concessions that have already been made. It is, on the other hand, perfectly easy to understand the hostility of consultants earning large incomes and of doctors who regard practices as a form of private property with which the State has no right to interfere. With these latter groups—the hard core of the opposition—there is nothing to be done; but it should be practicable to drive a wedge between them and the large body of G.P.s who see the need for a really national Health Service, but have been persuaded, out of false suspicions that the Government is really plotting to turn them all into civil servants, to follow the lead of the self-interested opposition which still wants one medical service for the rich and another—grossly inferior to it—for the poor.

The Zionist Congress

Basle, Tuesday (By Cable).

All parties at the Congress with the exception of the small Hashomer Hazair Party, which believes in a "Bi-National State," are agreed on the necessity for a Jewish State in Palestine. It is considered that, since the 1939 White Paper and the 1940 Land Transfer Regulation, Great Britain has not carried out, and shows no sign now of being willing to carry out, her twin Mandatory obligations to the Jews to facilitate immigration and to encourage close settlement on the land. Under these circumstances, the Jews demand the right to guide their own destinies, which they can only do if they have sovereignty. On this all are agreed.

The main point at issue is whether to press for the Jewish people's "full right"—the establishment of a Jewish State in the whole of Palestine. This is the view of the Revisionists, of a well-knit American group under the leadership of Dr. Silver, and of the religious Mizrachi Organisation. The alternative is to empower the Jewish Agency to negotiate with the British Government on the basis of a "viable Jewish State in an adequate area of Palestine," i.e. Partition. This solution is supported, though not perhaps with much enthusiasm, by the bulk of the Labour Movement as well as by some of the General Zionists, the Centre party which has the biggest representation at the Congress.

The most effective plea for the maximalists' plan was made by Mr. Emmanuel Neumann, speaking in the name of a powerful section of the American Zionist movement. The main speeches for those who are ready to negotiate on the basis of something less than a Jewish State in the whole of Palestine came from Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who has been conducting negotiations for the Jewish Agency Executive in London and Washington, and Dr. Weizmann. Dr. Goldmann's brilliant mixture of diplomacy and *Realpolitik* made a profound impression on the General Zionists, who are more divided on this issue than any of the other parties. The fact that there is a large section, within the movement, which is willing to negotiate on the basis of Partition, is a tribute to the moderating influence of the Palestinian Jewish leaders, who are agreed on the necessity for negotiations.

The alternative line is being pushed mainly by some of the Americans. They argue for reliance on American support on the one hand and on organised resistance against the Mandatory Power in Palestine on the other. This does not mean support for the Irgun and Stern gangs, which were denounced by everybody with the exception of the Revisionists, and against which the Basle Police Force and Agency officials have organised all kinds of security measures. What it does mean is a call to the Haganah to start active resistance.

There is a tough fight, and it is impossible to predict which way the decision will go. The final vote will take place next week when members of the new Executive of the Jewish Agency will be elected.

PARLIAMENT: Great Expectations

Wednesday

THE debate on India took place in a heavy grey fog which seemed to penetrate the minds of many speakers. An exaggerated sense of responsibility sometimes obfuscates clear thought. Naturally Sir Stafford Cripps, who opened the debate, could not analyse the situation or discuss the future. But back benchers on both sides, whose words are not weighed as official utterances, could well have done so.

The only right thing about Mr. Churchill's attitude to India was his demand for a full-dress debate. For two years this subject has been continuously postponed. Whatever the difficulties for the Government speakers, it is proper that the House should discuss one of its heaviest responsibilities. Mr. Morrison was, therefore, wise to accede, however reluctantly, to Mr. Churchill's request. Incidentally, he thus avoided a discussion of the Army which would have brought up the embarrassing topic of conscription.

But if Mr. Churchill's demand for a debate was justified, his speech was not. For the most part it was a rambling and incoherent prophecy of coming disaster, without any clear indication of the policy which either he or—a very different thing—his Party would pursue. His only lively passage was an impromptu accusation that Sir Stafford Cripps had been "disastrously" biased in favour of Congress. To prove his point he seemed at one moment to be ready to reveal the private discussions of the War Cabinet. But the look on Sir Stafford Cripps' face made him have second thoughts. Indeed, the one dramatic moment was the intervention of Sir Stanley Reed. Finding himself compelled to support a Socialist Government's policy and to admit his inability to predict the future, he performed the distasteful task of carving up the speech of his leader with the scarcely suppressed emotion of an old-fashioned imperialist who cares more for India than for Party loyalty. Mr. Godfrey Nicholson spoke with an embarrassed and somewhat confused sincerity. It was clear that the Opposition, though resenting the necessity for British withdrawal, hesitated to state categorically that, in the event of a breakdown, the British Raj should be restored.

Most Government speeches were equally reticent on this central issue. Mr. Alexander, who wound up with a vigorous fighting speech, not unnaturally refused to be drawn by Mr. Churchill. A number of back benchers contented themselves with pious hopes and surprisingly avoided any Socialist analysis of the reasons for our present difficulties. Only Woodrow Wyatt boldly pulled the skeleton of evacuation out of the cupboard and forced the House to look shudderingly at it. His example was not followed.

The Second Reading of the Transport Bill was the Opposition's biggest chance so far. Mr. Barnes soon disposed of any anxiety about his capacity to handle a major Bill. "The best Ministerial speech on a second reading so far," said one back bencher. Relief may have caused him to exaggerate a little, but Mr. Barnes certainly made an excellent impression, speaking freely, without too close attention to his brief. Whether this was to be a big Parliamentary occasion depended on the first speaker for the Opposition. Maxwell Fyfe seems unable to get rid of the habits of Nüremberg and fails to realise that forensic thunder is not necessarily the best choice for a big Parliamentary occasion. Hugh Dalton genially performed the double task of annihilating the Opposition and giving the answers to the unspoken doubts of his own side. Many Tories used the Party brief to make the same speech, and from the Labour side there were loyal contributions from Railway and Transport workers, varied occasionally by an original and witty speech such as that of Dick Mitchison. By the end of the second day it was clear that the great expectations of the Opposition had been once again disappointed. After the adjournment of the big debate, Government supporters could brawl with the obstinate Major Manningham-Buller about their own late-night transport with the comfortable feeling that they could safely concentrate on minor issues.

PHINEAS

A CHRISTMAS LETTER

My dear Mat,

You see, I am keeping my promise—a long Christmas letter. If it does not reach you by Christmas, then blame yourself for living six thousand miles away, and the air services, which are rarely what they are cracked up to be. At this end I shall have done my best. If it does not seem to you my best, please remember that, like most people here, I am living and working in a heavy mixed mood of tiredness, staleness and exasperation.

You remember those family acrobatic turns in which, as a finale, a gloomy muscle-bound Papa, wishing to God he was back in his digs with a pint of stout and the evening paper, supported the whole troupe of brisk, smiling youngsters? Well, we are all rather like Papa, except that we have no tights, no band, no coloured spotlights, and not much hope of applause at the end of the act. I keep pointing out that a band and coloured spotlights would help us a bit, because, as I have told you before, behind that glum adult mask of ours we English are an imaginative and rather childlike people. But politicians who have long been in Opposition and now bask in the sudden glory of power and prestige cannot be expected to listen yet to such complaints. The House is a cosy establishment, and in there it is easy to forget that the streets of Coketown, where so many pretty things for export are produced, are still black and wet, cheerless as ever.

During the last six months I have been moving about a good deal. Work in the theatre has taken me to various provincial cities, and I have also been abroad more than once. (In the last fifteen months I have visited Berlin, Moscow, Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Bern, Prague, Vienna, Paris, to name only the capitals.) All this coming and going, which I now find I dislike, has at least given me the chance of seeing this country both from the inside and the outside; and so, if I generalise hugely and rashly about us English—and I trust it is still what you would expect, my dear Mat—then I do so, if not with authority, then at least with some knowledge. I have been around, and I have kept my eyes and ears open.

First, I must tell you about one of my recent adventures in the theatre. This summer I produced an experimental comedy about love and marriage, a gay and rather impudent affair that breaks all the old rules, a piece called "Ever Since Paradise," which went off on a four months' tour of the chief provincial theatres. I had to keep looking at it, being producer as well as author, and I found it playing everywhere to packed and enthusiastic houses. (It is waiting now for a London theatre.) Now here, in these crowded playhouses, was the noisiest possible confirmation of what I have told you before, namely, that the war gave our people a new mental alertness. For I swear to you, out of years of experience, that before the war a play of this sort would have been performed round the provinces to half-empty and bewildered houses. The difference was startling, more dramatic than my play. Of course, the people have more money to spend, and less to spend it on, than they had then, but this at best would only account for the size of the audiences and not for their quick receptiveness, which is the important thing.

What is happening elsewhere in the Theatre, and with books, ballet, music (and London now has more concerts than any other city in the world, and the Queen's Hall gone, too!), all tells the same tale. I arrived in Vienna not long ago for the last night of the Sadlers Wells Ballet there, and lunched later with some Russian journalists who were astonished at the colour, grace and wit we had brought to Central Europe. And please notice, my dear lad, that it is in these communal arts, the very ones we were supposed to care nothing about, that we are making such sudden and surprising progress. As if the English

had jumped back to their Sixteenth Century form! What has happened? My own guess—and I will not put it higher than that at the moment, though I was always better at guessing than at deducing—is that with the recent loss of power of a ruling class, which clamped a false *persona* on to our national character, the real nature of the English is streaming through the cracks in this emotionless mask. And our unconscious, which is far more indifferent to the sour individualism of the Tory Press than most of our Labour Ministers are, commands us to *do something together*, if only to entertain ourselves.

What is *not* happening, Mat, is that all this communal art is being mightily encouraged. Put that idea straight out of your head. The Arts Council, for home supply, and the British Council, for export purposes, do their best, with such small authority and munitions as they are allowed to possess. They work largely in a grudging atmosphere, and most of the countries I have visited can show comparatively more generous treatment of the arts and artists. (But the lines on which we are working here are the right ones: no official dictation to the artists as to what they shall produce; no Transport House symphonies, no T.U.C. fiction and drama.) As for the rest, almost every possible obstacle is jammed in our way. We lack paper, binding, artists' materials, concert halls, control of theatres; every rotten old kind of commercial exploitation is in full swing; and the pirates, parasites and hangers-on seem to multiply rather than vanish.

The popular Press, with one or two rare exceptions, not only gives no help but does its best to hinder. Sometimes I feel that its editors and subs. are the most old-fashioned people in the country, for they plug away at the same old stuff. For instance, they still print those long, drearily written articles complaining about our lack of success in international sport. It never seems to occur to them that perhaps we English, having successfully taught other peoples to play our games, might in our secret souls now want to express ourselves in some other fashion, might desire new and different triumphs. For my part I find some significance in the fact that all these articles, claiming so much space and attention, are written so mechanically, so dully. Their authors seem half-asleep. Authentic cries from a nation's heart do not sound like this. I seem to see a queue of up-to-the-minute Fleet Street boys, all solemnly waiting for a bus that went hours ago. If we members of the British delegation to the Unesco Conference had got together a bad hockey team and had been trounced by a mixed eleven from Irak and Ecuador, they would have given us the headlines. Because we only put forward some good ideas to help the education, science and culture of forty-four nations, most of them could not spare us a single reporter. Out of date, that's their trouble.

If we mention writing and cries from the heart, however, there is something to be said for the other side. Our young Leftish intellectuals are beginning to worry me. They seem to leave out of their writing too many of their best qualities. You meet them, probably with a gallant young wife and a baby or two, and usually they have charm and humour as well as a fine hopefulness that helps them to overcome the handicaps, bad at any time and particularly grim now, that await young writers trying to settle down. They don't appear to sulk or whine. Often they go round to the local pub and exchange jokes and gossip with anybody they find there. They seem to make the best of what can be a rather bad job. I like them when I meet them. But I don't like them much when I read them. Too much has dropped out. Where, among these messy little poems, these arrogant attempts at criticism, these sour short stories and articles, are the charm and the humour and the gallant hopefulness, the fun and kindness of home, the tolerant give-and-take of the pub? Why do they immediately fall back on a secondary and far less amiable personality as soon as they sit down at their typewriters? Why is their writing such a miserably diminished and distorted reflection of their ordinary pleasant selves? Why save the worst for the reader?

I can go on asking these questions, Mat, but I cannot answer them. And what worries me is that this narrow arrogance and this lack of any persuasive quality in their writing are only widening the gulf between these younger intellectuals and the large public. (The B.B.C. Third Programme, of which you must have heard, may do something to help here, unless, of course, it persists in taking the gulf for granted.) When you and I were growing up, Shaw and Wells, Belloc and Chesterton could pop up anywhere, in any halfpenny paper, on any platform, and be understood and appreciated by the crowd. But now, when the crowd is no worse and even a good deal better, these thin, high complaining voices are lost in the gulf. And people want to be talked to, want some writing they can enjoy, need some authors who seem to them public figures. Oddly enough, many of these young men served during the war in propaganda and public relations departments. That may have done it, of course, for now they may be reacting too strongly against their wartime jobs.

I need hardly tell you, Mat, that here we could do with all the persuasiveness we can command. Our chief failure, out of which all our other failures may spring, is to convince ourselves of the value of what we are trying to do. Every time I am abroad, where all too often there are seven fine courses in the restaurant and only one meagre course in the factory canteen, where the black marketeers and their blondes drive up in glittering new cars to order double Martinis that cost more than a workman's daily pay, I think of England with pride added to affection, and am glad to hurry home. Half our papers tell me at once what a mess we are making of everything, though I suspect that the very men who put out this mischievous rubbish, day after day, know what a screaming chaos this country would be in if we had not had a Labour Government, if only to take the strain. But then, and not because of the papers, the reaction sets in again. I tell myself "We are doing a wonderful job here," but it is hard to keep on saying it, for never did a wonderful job look less like one. Yes, of course, we are tired, we are exasperated, we look and feel shabby, and are notoriously short of this and that. But the truth is, that none of this would matter very much if the emphasis were on something else, and that something else were capable of giving us a lift.

All our lives we have known men and women who were far shabbier than most of us are now, who were far shorter of this and that than we are, but who nevertheless lived richly and glowed with deep inner satisfaction because they felt they moved steadily nearer a goal, because their lives knew a high aim, a glorious purpose. Ah, but these were fanatics and saints, not the ordinary grumbling stolid English. Quite so, and we must not expect too much. But I tell you, my dear Mat—and I write of what I know—that I do not believe in these English who want nothing but bananas and silk stockings, new radio sets and cars. Of course, they would like these things—and if their attention is called every morning and evening to their lack of them, they want them all the more—but what most of them desire more than anything else is the conviction that they are living, not only usefully instead of uselessly, but also grandly and nobly, in the very thick of the battle for the survival of Western Man, helping to steer this country, and perhaps fifty others behind it, between the rocks and the whirlpool, so that one day their grandchildren will look wonderingly at the worn faces of the Great Generation, which twice saved the world. Yes, Mat, I know—I'm feeding you rhetoric, oratory, platform stuff—and I'll stop it—but by heaven!—I wish somebody would stand up, sweep aside all the vague promising and futile nagging, and shout such things at the top of his voice. And add that the people who didn't like it could lump it.

And will this, I hear you ask, bring us the houses, the new towns, the schools and hospitals and halls we so badly need, the exports and the jobs and the social security? My reply is that, with reasonable planning, it will. For what matters most, as we soon discovered in 1940, is what people are feeling. The difference between sulky acquiescence and a generous and eager co-operation can amount to what looks like a miracle. Why have we so many complaints about red-tape now? Chiefly because so many people have time to tie it on, and so many other people have time to notice it. Men are in such a mood these days that if they are not inspired to attempt the impossible, then it is likely they will not even achieve the probable. Haunted as we are by nightmares of world ruin, caution and cold calculation cannot keep us at our desks or machines half-an-hour longer than we think necessary; we may have the plans but we need some blazing vision behind them, creating new energy; it is the hour of Blake, not Bentham. We have, thank goodness, some sound economists in this Government. But there are times when I would exchange them all for one inspired phrase-maker.

The trouble is, Mat, that I am always meeting people here now who have packed up. They are no longer with us, except to draw their rations and spend money that nobody particularly wants. They are neither rowing nor baling out the leaky boat. I meet men younger than myself, men with technical knowledge and experience, who appear to be permanently on strike, although no Tory paper ever condemns them. They are not bad types, quite decent sensible fellows; but it does not occur to them that they have no more right to be idle now than they would have had in 1940, when most of them were doing good work. They are behaving like this because they are living in the wrong atmosphere, in which we seem to them to be playing pre-war politics again so that it does not matter whether they co-operate or not. They are not only not taking part in a revolution, or even in a social experiment, but they are sitting about waiting for 1946 to turn into 1936—without Hitler. And why not, when nobody either persuades them or gives them sharp orders? And naturally the infection spreads, with shoulder-shrugging all down the line, with ex-Service lads muttering "What did I bloody well tell you?"

Yes, it's the wrong atmosphere that does it. And I fancy that it is not merely because we are short of paint and silk shirts that our visitors, willing to admire but rather puzzled, find us drab. You see, we lack the corrupt glitter of the countries where public spirit is dead and all is cynicism; we cannot generate the excitement of a truly revolutionary atmosphere; so every visitor has time to notice our shabby woodwork and frayed collars. And yet—and yet, as I said earlier, Mat—the fact remains that the gigantic old emotionless mask is cracking, and through the fissures come gleams of colour, laughter, bursts of music. As if, unnoticed as yet by politicians, Press and visitors, the real English, Shakespeare's English, were coming home. And along that line, if we add to it some genuine moral leadership for the world (and our strength outside is there now, and nowhere else), we may find our way out, out and then home.

I am writing this in the Island, up in my ship's bridge of a study. The five large windows are still curtainless, but that only means that I seem nearer the weather up here. Yesterday was as strangely sunny and tranquil as the background landscape to some Fifteenth Century Madonna; this morning the gale blew up from the South-West, and I can see the elm tops shivering; but to-morrow the Island may be all pale gold and silver, Avalon again. And heavy mood, wrong atmosphere and all, we live, old lad, still we live; and in a day or two the family will arrive, plus God knows who, to fill the place with young and cheerful noise. On Boxing Night, between the conjuring and the music, my dear Mat, I will most solemnly drink your health, remembering good days and planning somehow for more of them. We defy augury, and are yours as ever,

J. B. PRIESTLEY

A LONDON DIARY

EVERY year on Christmas Eve, English children go to bed optimistically hoping that Christmas will live up to its white reputation. Perhaps this year the village of Charing Cross will really be transformed into an urban version of Dingley Dell; perhaps we can turn the statue of Charles I into a snowman? Statistically it is unlikely; grey London mist would be more usual. Indeed, though we can all recall odd years when snow has fallen at Christmas time—you remember the sparkling icicles of Christmas, 1944?—the truth is that a white Christmas is largely a Dickens' myth. A friend who has gone over the meteorological records of Dickens's time declares that Dickens himself can only have twice experienced snow at Christmas; the first time was in his impressionable childhood and the second (the origin of Dingley Dell) was the same Christmas which Washington Irving also enshrined as a typically English Yuletide. For the rest, our Christmas-card Christmases are mainly a Continental import brought in, like the Christmas tree, by Albert the Good, complete with German snow.

* * *

Now, it seems, science has found a way of enabling us to turn our Christmas myth into snowy reality. We can manufacture Dingley Dells at will. An American scientist has discovered a means of precipitating snowfalls. Special pellets, dropped on the clouds by aeroplane, will precipitate up to sixty tons of snow for each pellet. So long as this discovery does not lead to the nations fighting about their fair share of English weather I'm all in favour of it. I foresee elections fought between farmers' parties wanting rain and winter-sports enthusiasts who want perpetual snow.

* * *

The best dialogue I have heard this Christmas went like this:

Middle-class woman; "I don't see any signs of things getting better. They are worse than ever if you ask me. Worse than wartime . . . ."

Man; "Quite so. It would be a grand Christmas if there were two million unemployed, wouldn't it?"

That's what it comes down to. Middle-class people complain because they don't realise that for the first time they are sharing their food with people who used to go without. Milk is about as important as anything; the country is actually drinking nearly half as much again as it used to before the war. Even with bread rationing, the nation eats more flour in bread and cakes and the rest of it than it did in 1939. We eat more jam and marmalade and more fish, and even in meat, about which people complain most, we are eating 98 per cent. of the amount of fresh and tinned meat consumed in the pre-war years. Unless you remember the people who were on the dole before the war, you find it hard to believe that even in sugar we eat four-fifths of our pre-war consumption. Knowing this, I get annoyed when our local publican and his wife, who are otherwise a very pleasant pair, begin grousing to all and sundry about the shortage of everything. They should know when the cigarettes run out that that is not because there are less cigarettes, but because we smoke a great many more. But when I talk individually to the working people who have been standing by silently in the pub, I do not find that they make much complaint of being badly off. After all, an agricultural labourer's wages have risen from 30*s.* to £3 10*s.*, and as a lorry driver remarked to me, "If things aren't all beer and skittles yet, who is to blame for that? It took us three years to get organised for war; you couldn't expect to reorganise the country for peace afterwards any quicker, could you?"

* * *

The *Sunday Express* of December 15th surely reached a new "low," when it tried to suggest that the Government was responsible for the still undiagnosed epidemic among new-born babies. "What is Causing the Baby Deaths?" asked the streamer headline. "Medical experts say poor food; overcrowded hospitals; a serious shortage of midwives and ward domestics." Then followed remarks from unspecified medical experts (I should like to know who they are) who hold that, though expectant mothers get the highest food priorities, their vitality is so undermined by bad food that their babies suddenly die in four different hospitals in towns as wide apart as Leicester, Preston and Oxford. Nowhere is there any effort to explain why the overcrowding and shortage of midwives (which are no doubt bad enough), should suddenly kill off thirty babies in hospitals where hundreds of babies have hitherto been doing well enough. There is something nauseating about this effort to exploit the suffering of mothers for party propaganda.

* * *

When in 1945 the reforming Emperor Bao-Dai renounced the throne of Annam, he explained that he preferred to be a simple citizen of a free country to being the sacred sovereign of a subject country. Since then the documents published by the Viet-Nam Republic have emphasised, often in the language of the French Revolution, that the Annamese are claiming, as of right, the freedom that the citizens of France won for themselves in the 18th century. But the French, who recognised the independence of Viet-Nam last year, have not kept faith with the Annamese. In Paris they pretended to negotiate with Ho-Chi-Minh, the President of Viet-Nam, but they have constantly sought to divide the Annamese and to prevent their union with the other peoples of Indo-China. I learnt the other day the story of how one such intrigue was countered. The ex-Empress, who (like her husband) was educated in Paris, was persuaded, after many indirect approaches to receive some French officers who were seeking her cooperation in setting up a puppet provisional government. They arrived at her home, where, at tea, they were introduced to the parents and relatives of the Empress. Before they had any chance of putting their proposals before her, the Empress sat down at the piano and played the national anthem of the Viet-Nam. The Annamese all stood and sang the anthem and the French officers perforce stood at attention. The Empress then whispered to the Frenchmen that she had given the answer to the proposals which they had in mind, but which it was now unnecessary for them to make.

Perhaps it is because such intrigues worked so ill, that the French have sent the ultra-imperialist General Argenlieu back to Cochin-China; at any rate I found in Paris the other day that no one doubted that his appointment amounted to a declaration of war on Viet-Nam. I gathered that the Socialist Colonial Minister, M. Moutet, was by no means happy about the choice of d'Argenlieu and I hope that with M. Blum as Premier the wheels will be reversed.

* * *

"I don't think any other imperial nation has ever had a conference like that," said a friend after the Fabian Society's Conference on colonial affairs last Saturday. It was certainly a remarkable occasion. The 500 people present to question the Secretary of State for the Colonies about his policy, included about 150 coloured people who asked pointed questions and received frank answers. No doubt we ought to take this kind of thing for granted, but it is in fact something of an innovation—a Socialist innovation—for the Secretary of State publicly to subject himself to questions from representatives of the African colonies for which he is responsible. The result of explaining his objects and his difficulties to the people themselves will have a considerable effect on future relations.

* * *

The troika glides through the pine alleys, the quail fall on the frozen steppe to the sportsman's gun, there is a ball in Petersburg, the moujik looks up from the railway track or from the byre; at the windows of the country house the lady yawns and the servant scratches as they gaze at the endless sky over the endless steppe. The samovar is brought in and a voice says, "There is a new provincial governor in our town. . . ." Is there any country other than our own that we know more intimately, vividly, personally than the Russia of the nineteenth century as it is presented to us in the Russian novel? This picture we owe before anyone else to Mrs. Constance Garnett, the greatest of the Russian translators, whose death I am sorry to have to record this week. Mrs. Garnett rescued the Russian novels from the dull and hack translators who threatened to make them unreadable and she recreated them for the English reader. Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoievsky, Tolstoy, and Chehov were wholly, or almost wholly, translated by her, and her work ran into some seventy volumes. To the English novelist these translations revealed a new approach to their problems; the plot-bound novel, and above all the English short story, had to be re-cast. Mrs. Constance Garnett was a translator whose work has had a double effect. It introduced a new literature to us; and it has had a profound influence on our own.

* * *

I couldn't help laughing as I caught sight of my feet on the pavement. No one else saw the joke, for the citizens of Charing Cross are mostly too busy to notice anything odd about another citizen's feet. The fact was that I'd come out wearing a Canadian shoe of the single piece kind on one foot and an English utility shoe with a round toe-cap on the other. I supposed I should have to go back and change. And then the notion came to me that this was quite silly. What did it matter to me or anyone else if my shoes were odd? Surely the convention is more odd than the shoes. No one is a penny the worse for my wearing shoes of different patterns. Nor, aesthetically, can I see any benefit in uniformity in such a matter. I walked on with my head up. I don't know how we ever came to be such sticklers for the dull fashion by which one's socks have to match, nor, if I am pressed, do I see why a citizen should be embarrassed if he wears parti-coloured clothes and makes a servicable pair of trousers with one leg from his blue suit and the other from the brown. Logic and common sense seem on my side; and yet I shuffled my feet a bit when I saw that the man opposite me in the Underground was regarding my shoes with a puzzled, injured expression.

CRITIC

THIS ENGLAND

A 5/- prize for the first entry in this column goes to Mrs. M. Wrigley.

Paste entries on postcard or slip of paper and give details of origin. Address to THIS ENGLAND, 10 Great Turnstile, W.C.1.

The other day I went out to post an important business letter, and, being anxious that it should reach its destination by a certain time, asked a postman who happened to be standing by what chance there was. His reply was: "Is it to Littlewoods?" I asked what difference that made. He replied, "Pools have priority."—*Manchester Guardian.*

Newquay (Cornwall) Council, wishing to repair some of the boats on their children's boating lake, applied to the Board of Trade for a licence to use 16 cubic feet of timber for the purpose.

The Board of Trade has returned their application and told them it should have been sent to the Admiralty.—*Daily Telegraph.*

Receiving permission from the Ministry to proceed with the building of a factory designed to employ disabled Servicemen, the Southgate Rotary Club find it accompanied by the provision that "no bricks, steel or wood" is used in the construction!—*Palmers Green and Southgate Gazette.*

An application by Mr. A. T. Taylor (Taylor's Eel Bar), Old Kent Road, for an extension of his licence, to sell tea, was granted, though Councillor E. C. Sherwood expressed doubt as to the advisability of drinking tea on top of stewed eels.—*Kentish Mercury.*

ARE THE FRENCH IMPOSSIBLE?

In recent months it has almost become a national habit to dismiss the French as impossible. Their intransigence with regard to the future of Germany has, it is argued, been the main reason for the failure to reach Four-Power unity in Berlin. Their constitutional crises are endemic and offensive to Anglo-Saxon definitions of common sense. Their black market stirs our puritan conscience just as French "immorality" used to do. The Francophil Conservatives of the 1920's who used to praise the realism of French foreign policy have now transferred their encomia to the U.S.A. As for the Labour Party, it looks with complacent scorn at the declining vote of the French Socialists and refuses on principle to have any contact with the Communists, although they are now the one party of the French working class.

This attitude to a former ally and a Democracy which is still the leading Power in Western Europe, and which shares with us the dominating position in Africa, is both short-sighted and rather indecent. It is time that we studied the "impossibility" of the French a little more objectively.

It is commonly asserted in London that a coherent French policy has been rendered impossible by the conflict between the pro-Russian Communists and the other French parties, and that it is M. Thorez and his colleagues alone who have deliberately sabotaged the chances of an Anglo-French agreement. This view is superficial. Any French statesman, whatever his party—with the possible exception of General de Gaulle and the neo-Fascists—must refuse to enter into any relations with Britain which imply a hostile attitude to the U.S.S.R. It is not merely the French Communists who hold this view. M. Bidault is equally convinced that France must contrive a middle policy between the opposing axes of Moscow and Washington. The French know perfectly well—even if we do not—that in the event of a major war, Western Europe would be just as indefensible against the Red Army as against the Communist Fifth Column. The first phase of any such war would begin with the Russian advance to Calais, which could not possibly be halted by any British Expeditionary Force or American Atomic Bomb. That this first phase might be followed by an Anglo-American invasion is no doubt possible; but liberation of this sort does not endear the prospect to Frenchmen.

Both French national interest and the domestic balance of power demand an attitude of neutrality in any Russian-American conflict and an attempt to prevent that conflict by mediation and by strengthening the effectiveness of the United Nations. All French parties agree that simultaneously an effort must be made on the economic side to negotiate the best terms possible with the Americans for the import of those goods which are essential for the reconstruction of French industry. Whether the agreement signed by M. Blum in Washington provided the best terms obtainable is naturally a matter for dispute.

The necessity for neutrality between America and Russia is common ground among the leaders of the M.R.P., the Socialists, the Radicals and even some of the Communists. That Frenchmen are agreed on this is evidence not that France is in an impossible mood, but that Frenchmen have been quick to recognise the changed status of France in the balance of World Power. Their unanimity on this point accounts for the suspicion with which Mr. Bevin and his colleagues are regarded by all Frenchmen except those on the extreme Right. A Britain which gives the appearance, to put it mildly, of welcoming an Anglo-American *entente* excludes herself automatically from any *rapprochement* with France. But France has not forgotten the rôle of Britain in 1940, and there has never been a period when French affection for this country was stronger. A Britain with an independent policy which sought to co-operate equally with the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. would be able to establish intimate relations with France, irrespective of the parties which composed the French Cabinet. Britain has to choose between a special partnership with America and a special partnership with France and our other European neighbours. If the Labour Government regards Russian aggression as the one threat to British security, it must choose the first. If it still believes in the possibility of an understanding with Russia, and of world government developing slowly through the United Nations, it will choose the second. Our relations with France are now distant, precisely because Frenchmen of all parties are convinced that Mr. Bevin has chosen the first; and they draw the inevitable conclusion that, this being so, they cannot risk an Anglo-French agreement committing them to the U.S. camp.

The second main principle of French policy is, of course, security against German aggression. While politicians in Washington, London and Moscow have all ruled Germany out as a potential aggressor and fear her only as an auxiliary in either a Communist or a Capitalist conspiracy, the French cling tenaciously to the view that, given the opportunity, Germany could once again threaten France. We may consider their calculations far-fetched, but it is futile to brush them aside if we desire French co-operation in the reconstruction of Europe. Frenchmen remember that after the last war Clemenceau desired to separate the Ruhr and the Rhineland from the Reich in the interest of French security, and that he was persuaded to give up this project by the solemn pledge of an Anglo-American guarantee. They remember that after the Peace Treaties were signed and the Ruhr and Rhineland were left to Germany, this guarantee was abandoned. They are determined, therefore, not to be tricked again; and this time an Anglo-American guarantee is no satisfactory substitute for the partition of Germany, since it would merely involve France in an anti-Soviet alliance which would increase her military commitments and decrease her national security. It is this which explains the obduracy of the French Members of the Control Commission in Berlin. They are opposed to Anglo-American plans for rehabilitating Western Germany. They see in them an implicit anti-Russian move which is also a threat to France because these plans include the revival of German heavy industry. But they are equally opposed to any suggestions for reviving a central German administration and re-establishing a Central German Government, because these plans, too, fail to meet their demand for security. Hence, argues the Frenchman, the only solution is the partition of Germany.

There is no way out of the Anglo-French *impasse* so long as France believes that Britain, forsaking Europe, has sought the protection of America against Communist aggression and is ready to revive German industry for the same purpose. It was this suspicion which made the French reaction to the visit of Schumacher and his colleagues so violent. Even if Britain and America could reach an agreement with Russia next March on the future of Germany, this solution, if it neglected the French case, would have to be imposed on France and for that matter on all the other Western European nations, which have experienced the horrors of German invasion. It would in fact be a Big Three decision, enforced in defiance of the States directly concerned. Such an agreement, however, in the present mood of Soviet Russia, is in the highest degree unlikely, since it would jeopardise the position of Communist Parties throughout Europe by compelling them to support a plan for Germany in direct conflict with the interests of their respective nations.

But could French fears of a revived Germany be met by a Britain which gave up its special relations with America and co-operated equally with East and West? Certainly the chances would be far better if the German problem were discussed next March after the signature of an Anglo-French agreement. Such an agreement would, by its very nature, remove some of the suspicions of both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. That a French Government signed it would be a guarantee to Moscow that it was not anti-Communist in character. The British signature would give an equal guarantee to the U.S.A. that its purpose was not to subordinate Europe to the U.S.S.R. Once this has been achieved, France and Britain might then, in co-operation with their smaller neighbours, work out the details of a common security plan which preserved the unity of Germany, but removed the possibility of German aggression.

It is clear that Britain holds the key to the solution of this problem. So long as we appear to our fellow Europeans to be playing the role of junior partner in an American alliance, we compel them to obstruct every sane plan for the settlement of the German problem. But if we could make it clear that we regard our relations with them and with our Dominions as our first and major pre-occupation, and that we are determined to avoid exclusive commitments to either the Americans or the Russians, the way would be open to a genuine European solution of the German problem.

Recently, in arguing the case for Mr. Bevin in this journal, Mr. Crawley stressed the ideological affinity between democratic Britain and democratic America. It cannot have been unobserved in Paris that he made no reference whatsoever to the far closer bonds which should bind this country to Western Europe. It is almost incredible that, eighteen months after the end of the war, British Socialists should forget these cultural, economic and strategic ties. Perhaps after all it is not only the French who are impossible.

R. H. S. CROSSMAN

Welcome Yule

(After Sir Walter Scott)

Turn on the heat; the wind is chill,
We'll keep our Christmas merry still,
And, gorged with seasonable cheer,
Carouse in seas of post-war beer,
And see the festive season in
While carols roar their blithesome din,
And merrymakers come and go
Beneath imported mistletoe.
The housewife lays her apron by,
The slippered grandsire sports a tie,
The youth his woolly jerkin shows,
The damsel dons near-silken hose.
And now they spread about the board
Such pickings as the times afford.
Though turkey they cannot produce
Nor supplementary savoury goose,
The food controllers have released
More scraps for the domestic feast.
Greens and potatoes heaping high,
And saucers piled with Christmas pie.
And while Siberian blasts outside
Come howling down the chimney wide,
Till midnight they beguile the time
With merry tales of Christmas crime,
And tell how bumper Christmas stocks
Melt into air about the docks,
While fat black market booty swells
The revenue of large hotels.
And what though heat and current fail,
Still Christmas tells the merriest tale.
The fuel and the power cut
Are offset by the export glut.
The less consumers here consume,
The more the merry exports boom,
And new consumers oversea
Enjoy more Christmas revelry.
The merry Christmas Uno truce
Ends international abuse,
And now the star of peace and hope
Is visible by telescope.
So while amid December gales
Blue-nosed austerity prevails,
These hearthside Christmas gambols cheer
An economic programme drear.
Then let us hail this happy night
With almost uncontrolled delight!

SAGITTARIUS

VIENNA RE-VISITED

THE amiable old gentleman who shared my sleeper from Salzburg, a chartered accountant homeward-bound from a business trip, seemed as typical a Viennese as I could remember after an absence of eighteen years. I was soon to learn that he was quite exceptionally outspoken about the past. True, he had forgotten all about the Dollfuss artillery of 1934, and perhaps he had never grasped how that attack on the workers of Vienna helped to dig the grave of Austrian freedom. But he certainly remembered March, 1938. "Well, of course people cheered Hitler," he said; "you see, we were in such an economic mess, and we thought he'd get us out of it. For the moment we were intoxicated. The hangover came soon enough, and we've still got it."

If it be true that first and last impressions are the most significant, it is ironical that, when I passed Salzburg on my way out of Austria, hundreds of Nazi leaflets and thousands of little paper swastikas were being hurriedly swept from the romantically steep streets of that beautiful town. The amiable Chief of Police shrugged his shoulders. "Of course we didn't catch the culprits. *Da kann man nix machen.* Salzburg always was a Nazi *Hochburg*. But"—he added hastily—"most of them slip in from the Reich."

In between these first and last impressions I found Austria even more aloof from her Nazi past than Germany. Indeed, Minister, Party-Leader, and man-in-the-street alike were equally sensitive on the point that what they are looking forward to is not a Peace Treaty but a "State Treaty." (For who ever heard of their having been in the war?) To use a Freudian term created in their own fair city, they certainly seem to have been remarkably successful in "repressing" their Nazi past.

But is it still a fair city? It certainly is not just now; yet, to put on paper that Vienna and the Viennese have lost their famous charm makes one feel callous. With little food, less coal and next to no electric current, even the Viennese can hardly be expected to live up to their old tradition of gay nonchalance. Their old peculiar sort of good-natured grumbling—for which they had the untranslatable Austriacism *Raunzen*—even this has taken a desperately sharp edge, their good humour has gone sour, and their lackadaisical charm has turned into hopeless apathy. It is all this rather than physical destruction which has robbed the *Ring* and the *Kärntnerstrasse* of their old atmosphere, and which makes Vienna appear like some overgrown town rather than the great city it was (and will be again, one day).

Physically, though gravely hit in many parts, Vienna is not nearly as badly destroyed as most German cities; and while some of the severest damage or complete destruction has hit St. Stephen's Church, the *Burgtheater* and the Opera, these three, in spite of all housing problems, have been granted repair priority—a creditable sentiment and a pleasing thought for the Viennese and, indeed, for all Austrians. For this is certainly where the Austrians are better off than the Germans: at least they have a Central Government transcending the Zones of occupation, or at any rate trying its best to do so.

After a brief stay and with little space, I would not presume to try more than touch the surface of the complex problem presented by Austria these days. But I could not fail to notice the tense political atmosphere of Vienna, largely due to its being in the very centre of the ideological tug-of-war. An economic hinterland logically pointing East and a frame of mind yearningly turning West—this, in a nutshell (and somewhat over-simplified) is the position; and if the Ruhr coal is tardy to arrive on account of transport difficulties, the (less remote) Polish coal does not arrive at all, for a variety of reasons, some of them political. But whatever the reasons, one certain result is that the Viennese are freezing and in the dark, literally no less than metaphorically.

The atmosphere of tension and mutual suspicion between the occupation authorities is even worse than in Germany; it adds to the general frustration, bewilderment and apathy of the population, which are in any case the natural results of appalling material difficulties. As a matter of fact, in spite of their reputation for favouring the line of least resistance, the Viennese, or at least a good many of them, have valiantly tried to tackle their manifold problems; and it is no cause for surprise if they constantly quote their President's *bon mot* of Austria resembling a small boat steered by four elephants, each pulling in a different direction.

In spite of the shortage of paper—only less scarce than coal and iron—it is remarkable to find a large number of new papers and periodicals, some of them very good, and to notice that book production, as in Germany, has also started on a fairly ambitious scale. Similarly the theatre is reviving. While the *Burgtheater* is under repair, the famous ensemble is in the Ronacher, filling that very large theatre with a crowd as eager, if less festive, as any Vienna audience of old. I saw Feiler's *Seine sechste Frau*, meaning Henry VIII's Catherine Parr. The play was originally produced in 1941 and soon *verboten* on account of its scarcely veiled parody of Hitler. To have spoken those lines with *Gauleiter* Baldur von Schirach in the Vienna stage box rather than his present abode in gaol must have taken great courage.

HEINRICH FRAENKEL

PEOPLE: Kelabits (for Xmas)

THEY have never heard of Uno, Unilever, Beaverbrook, Ernie Bevin or Father Xmas. Far away behind the great mountain barrier of Tamabo and Apodari, in a world within a world, live a few thousand vigorous, tall, dark-skinned, long-haired, readily smiling pagans, who wear leopard teeth in their elongated ears, many bright bangles on their arms and legs, and call themselves Kelabits. Now the easy days of warplane and parachute are over, you must canoe for hundreds of miles up difficult rivers, until the rapids and rocks become too difficult, then for many days walk winding jungle tracks across what seems an unending series of six thousand feet ranges. At last you may come to their quiet three thousand feet plateau at the heart of Central Borneo. Even before the leech bites have fully festered or that jungle sore reached the bone, you will feel rewarded.

After the heat, the flies, the limited horizons and frequently inadequate diet of the lowland tribes, it is good to rest enclosed in this vast bowl with open views, grassland and rich earth, without fear of race, meanness, Molotov or the loss of personal liberty.

* * *

This week the Indian corn crop will have been gathered and stored in the great gourds and in the cockroach-dark bark cupboards. When the first rooster calls from the rafters overhead, everyone will start moving out to the stilt-legged huts overlooking the irrigated fields, where the rice will now be curving over gently to ripen. All day they work the vine-rope pulleys which agitate bamboo drums, frilled scarecrows and screeching miniature windmills, to keep off the cobalt-blue parrot-finches, pigeons, mouse-deer and monkeys, excited by an excellent crop. They will work this week like any other, only going home in the dusk, the women to make fire with flint and palm-cotton, the men to gather in firewood. Gangs of naked children chase amiable, flea-ridden dogs up and down the hundred yards long house, with bachelor quarters on the forward verandah, and the family homes, undivided by any partition, all along the back part of this leaf-thatched, plank-floored village—a complete and effective community buzzing with the day's gossip, which travels from housewife to housewife, fire to fire, as the tree-gum candles flare up to add another friendliness.

Most fruit and vegetables ripen any month, and there are many meats on the plain and the mountain. I'd have this sort of Xmas dinner up there at Bareo:

GRAPEFRUIT WITH CHOPPED SUGAR-CANE

*

RIVER TURTLE AND BIRD'S NEST SOUP

*

EELS STEWED IN GREEN BAMBOOS
Lime and Spring-salt sauce
Golden pimentos

*

MONKEY SWEETBREADS WITH CHOPPED EGGS AND CHILLIS

*

WATER-BUFFALO STEAK
Onion Sauce
Giant Beans
Fresh Ferntops
Roast Breadfruit

*

RICE TABLE with red, white and golden rice, sago and rice-balls, fried and fermented rice, wild tomatoes, Indian corn, pumpkin cakes, boiled marrow, sliced manioc, palm-shoots, pork slices, seasoned venison, goat chops, pheasant livers, doves' breasts, smoked brook-trout, boiled snails.

*

FATTENED CHICKEN BAKED IN COCONUT
Green Peas
New Potatoes
Cucumber and Tree-cabbage salad

*

PINEAPPLE AND DURIAN SALAD WITH CAVE HONEY

*

MUSHROOMS ON TOASTED TARO

*

PAWPAW, BANANA, PLUMS, TANGERINE, GINGER AND NUTS

*

BETEL

Cane Sherry
Rice Wine ——— Kelabit cigars
Sweet Potato Port
Arak

And what would we be talking about, in between shovelling up handfuls? Probably something to do with the exchange of eighteen precious blue beads for a fat pig which Lawai needs to sacrifice in his father's forthcoming funeral rites. Going on from that, where to find a flat-sided stone adequate to be erected as his memorial. After so many centuries there remain few rocks soft enough to carve, large enough to impress, and not too heavy to carry up from the river-bed. This has been a matter of grave concern lately. Next, I fancy someone will tell a hunting story—maybe the time Tingan was attacked by a honey-bear, or how Miri got his Pygmy Rhinoceros. By this time the palm-cups of rough wine start people showing off, shooting lines, telling funny stories, and silly (and dirty) ones.

The women finish clearing up and getting ready for a dawn breakfast. Young men tune up the delicately carved mandolines and bamboo flutes. Girls slide into best dresses and feather caps, ready to dance their rhythmic arm-leg-and-hip-sway, graceful but so repetitive that luckily no one minds if you don't watch.

All the while someone in a corner works spiral designs on a dance-shield (or clay cookpot). An old man, with quick, eyeless fingers threads strips of bamboo for a fish trap, or strips reeds to make a mat.

* * *

Those who are tired often sleep right alongside the party, rolled up in mats, from time to time through the night poking up the fire with their feet. To a Kelabit noise means nothing and privacy is undreamed of.

Here is no Utopia; too much hard work, bad weather, malaria. But there is plenty to do and look forward to: the feast another village is throwing in nineteen days' time; the baby that the woman of the last family but one at the far end of the house is expecting; the overdue return of the fellows who have been working away at the salt-springs; the chances of tobacco blight; the proposal to build a new suspension bridge over the stream where Agan was drowned when he crossed in a flood eleven harvests ago. And there is sufficient beauty in the cheerful, affectionate, tough, ugly women; in songs and stories, carvings and feather cloaks, scarlet parakeets,

overlush orchids, snow-white limestone pinnacles, or labyrinth designs tattooed from toe to waist; above all, in the simple efficiency, self-sufficiency, generosity and directness of a way of life.

Through a geographical accident the Kelabits have seldom been seen by a European. Let no one from our atomic world suppose himself fit, in 1946, to pose as superior to these illiterate people, in their vacuum of cosmic ignorance and social decency.

TOM HARRISSON

KITTY, KITTY, KITTY

I CAN never hazard more than a shrewd guess what it was that made Mr. Stephenson give way that morning. Usually when he left the Gothic porches of the terminus, he swallowed hard (for the train journey never wholly settled his large breakfast), then with set face (for the burden within him was leaden) he marched toward his spirit's temple which was that part of the City of London within a quarter of a mile radius of the Bank of England.

On the morning he gave way, he found himself marching to the words "Lucy Locket lost her pocket. Kitty Fisher found it." Only a psychologist could tell us whether Mr. Stephenson, so massively respectable, so painfully tortured by his inside, thought of Kitty first or of the rhyme first; and the psychologist's fee would really be wasted. For it is only necessary to explain that he had sung the rhyme when he was little and in pain from bolting his breakfast, and that he had been fond of a secretary called Kitty (her other name even now eluded him) when he was at the height of his success in the city. Now, as he marched sedately to his doom, the one and the other, the pleasant remote jingle of the rhyme and the pleasant—alas, all too remote—jangle of Kitty, merged, fused and caused him, I suppose, to give way.

He stopped and stroked the rather shabby genteel cat which inhabited the bombed solicitor's office in Lunnion Row. Moreover, instead of keeping his mind upon that day's business, he said: "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty. . . ."

"Yes, Mr. Stephenson," answered the cat in an elegant, if slightly affected, voice, not at all at a loss at being so suddenly addressed by one who always passed by so preoccupied. "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty . . ." said Mr. Stephenson, again, as if that was all he really intended to say and almost as if he had not heard the polite feline response.

"Oh, Mr. Stephenson, but you'll be late, won't you?" said the cat with a genteel switch of the hind quarters, but always retaining a remarkable poise upon the wooden paling where once the solicitor's front door had been. "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty . . ." murmured Mr. Stephenson for the third time, abstractedly.

"I wouldn't touch those Tulip Hill shares today, Mr. Stephenson. I'd go for the Lackspindle Deferred instead if I were you."

Mr. Stephenson stopped stroking the cat and glanced furtively up and down Lunnion Row where there were still acquaintances from his usual train making their way in twos and threes into the city.

"Why?" he said at last, a little irritated, but attentive, for though he prided himself a great deal upon backing his own judgment, that flair of his had been sadly lacking for some long time and the temples of his soul had been rather forlorn and draughty, subject to the chill winds of fear even upon the brightest days.

"Oh, it's just gossip," the cat said. "One picks up a lot round the city at night. And, as you had stopped, Mr. Stephenson," the cat leered winsomely, "I thought I'd just mention it."

The autumn sun shone upon the fabric of St. Paul's, upon the worthiness of the Mansion House and upon the solid substance of the temple of Mr. Stephenson's spirit, within radius of the Bank of England. Mr. Stephenson had an exceptionally good day. Very soon, indeed, he was to be seen five mornings a week pausing at the bombed solicitor's, glancing about him with the air of one who is on a good thing and hopes not to be disturbed while it lasts, stroking the cat and saying: "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty."

First-class passengers upon that line, however, in spite of their appearance of portentous reticence and high purpose, are strenuous gossips; and very soon Atkinson, Botherby, Clegg, Dogstein, Effable, Ffoulkin and (there is no need to mention them all for they are household words in the city) Younghusband and Zink, had observed both that Stephenson stroked the shabby, genteel cat and that Stephenson could do no wrong. As the autumn passed, therefore, Mr. Stephenson's good nature and *esprit de corps* were undermined bit by bit. Each day he was joined by more and more of his acquaintances and friends in Lunnion Row, all saying "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty," all stroking the gratified and would-be elegant cat, and all, from Atkinson to Zink, forming themselves into a syndicate to operate exclusively upon the cat's advice.

Mr. Stephenson, it must be said to his credit, possessed a sense of justice; and when Christmas approached, he felt the need to do something for the cat, who he supposed would have a lonely few days in Lunnion Row in the midst of a desolate unfestive city. It was a pity that Botherby was allowed to have anything to do with it, for it was he who broached the matter of mice; and instantly Zink, who practically owns one of the big departmental stores, offered to obtain them. In Christmas week, Mr. Stephenson, with many of his syndicate, marched up Lunnion Row bearing their sordid sacrifice, two white mice in cellophane, which they had had the greatest trouble to conceal with any dignity while maintaining a portentous reticence in the train. "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty." He began, "As Christmas approaches, we feel . . ." It was a well-worded, carefully composed speech: but while it gratified the members of the syndicate, it seemed to be accepted by the cat with a composure almost bordering upon disdain. The mice were deposited upon what had been the solicitor's doorstep, as Mr. Stephenson rather lamely finished his oration. The cat arched herself and yawned. Some said that there was embarrassment in her expression; others declared it to be venom cunningly concealed. "I can only respond to such sentiments, Mr. Stephenson and gents, by mentioning that I have an absolutely red-hot tip before the markets are closed for Christmas . . . ."

A stranger passing through Lunnion Row, on his way to do business in the City of London, might, I suppose, almost have been tempted to bestow a second glance upon that scene, the cluster of worthy men against the wooden paling in front of the bombed offices, and the attention upon their astute faces as a refined voice pronounced the words: "Mango Mines." Nevertheless, a stranger would have been wise also to have ignored the significance of these words as market advice, and to have forgotten them: for, as all the world knows, the Mango Mines blew up upon that Christmas Eve, taking into the air not only many unfortunate Mangos but the whole resources of Mr. Stephenson and all the spare cash of the syndicate, from Atkinson to Zink, associated with him.

The cat still sat upon the palings in the mornings, taking no trouble to conceal a look of baleful satisfaction as Mr. Stephenson and the other gentlemen passed by. Rather ostentatiously, the cat displayed fat City mice for the gentlemen to see. Mr. Stephenson never said "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty." He had learnt many lessons in his life: but this last most painful one of all was never to insult the dignity, the altruism, and, above all, the vanity of a shabby genteel cat, more especially one of the more susceptible kind which responds to such a phrase as "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty."

JOHN PUDNEY

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The Arts and Entertainment

THEATRE

"Mrs. Dane's Defence," at the Embassy Theatre

It needs no besotted addict of Theatre to appreciate the luck which gives us *Mrs. Dane's Defence*, written on the very crest of the renaissance of our stage, in the same month as a revival of *Caste*, that fine primitive of 1867. They are separated by only 33 years, yet this new production of *Mrs. Dane* makes us realise how great the advance in dramatic sophistication had been. True, in 1900 there was the Ibsen scare, and the Wilde scandal. True that Bernard Shaw showed signs, after rising like a rocket, of sticking like a star. Yet it is remarkable how many of these improvements were laid by his contemporaries to the credit of the solid foundation work of Henry Arthur Jones.

To the G.B.S. of the *Saturday Review*, H.A.J. was the hero, as Pinero was the villain, of the contemporary British stage. In the Jones of 1900 we see a dramatist who has absorbed the machinery of playwriting so completely that it has ceased to seem mechanical. There is a human inconsistency and lack of black and whiteness about his characters which would have made the plots of a lesser writer unmanageable. Henry Arthur Jones was my own first instructor in the mysteries of the stage, and perhaps my appreciation of *Mrs. Dane* is coloured by my memory of his own endearing character—his impatience, his warmth, his love of letting off steam, his honesty, his sympathy with human misfortune and his passion for solid professional work. It is these characteristics which give his plays so much more life than was ever to be found in those neat little packages which Pinero was in the habit of giving birth to, every autumn, at the St. James's Theatre. Jones's best plays were indeed more experimental than *Mrs. Dane*. Yet it must be admitted that Henry Arthur suffered from a certain limitation; that he was an originator partly because he refused to learn from others; and that his reaction first against the realism of Ibsen, and then against the ideological drama of Shaw, was due not so much to his passion for new worlds as to the jealousy with which he guarded his position against the upstart encroachments of rival dramatists. He could state the problem in *Mrs. Dane*; but it has no more, and no less, relevance to life than the typical Royal Academy "problem picture" of the period.

The story of the lady with the Past (should she reveal it, and should she thereby lose her love?) is staged at the Embassy with such an exact sense of period that we scarcely notice that there is any period about it. On the whole, the acting matches the play—from Mr. Ronald Simpson, who makes one of his admirably precise little studies (here he is the henpecked husband who pecks back) to Miss Gillian Lind in the character of the understanding woman. Miss Ellis as Mrs. Dane succeeds in suggesting one thing to the audience and another to her stage inquisitors throughout three difficult acts. Mr. Allenby, as the Judge, though he cannot achieve the superbity of Wyndham, threads his way through the minefields of the part a little too tentatively, perhaps, like a cat on hot bricks: but his pouncing, when he does strike, is all the more effective.

STEPHEN POTTER

THE FAIRY QUEEN

SINCE there is no English Equivalent of *Meistersinger* or *The Bartered Bride*, I doubt if a better choice could have been made than this to inaugurate the new operatic era at Covent Garden.

Strictly speaking *The Fairy Queen* is not an opera, but a hotchpot, typical of Restoration theatrical taste: a perversion of Shakespeare, in which each act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is concluded with an interpolated entertainment in honour of Titania, part masque, part ballet and part sing-song. Not a line, alas, of Shakespeare's text did Purcell set to music, not even the songs; all the same, he poured into this gallimaufry some of his loveliest melodic inventions. In its original form the piece

must have been immensely long; some say as much as seven hours. At Covent Garden it takes less than three, and the pruning has been judicious: the fairies are left more or less intact, but the quartet of lovers have vanished, Theseus and Hippolyta with them, and the clowns are reduced to a single rehearsal—and no performance—of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

The result of all this is an entertainment ideally suited not only to the present moment of transition at Covent Garden (ballet into opera), but to our traditional notions of a Christmas show. It works out as a pantomime planned by artists for patrons who enjoy the arts. After Shakespeare and Purcell, the chief credit for its success should go to Michael Ayrton, whose elaborate scenery and costumes are among the most successful I remember in an English opera house. Half-ruined temples, lakes, fountains with real water, transformation scenes and a Chinese finale: the whole presented with a continual opulence of colour which never lapses into the gaudy, not even for Titania's robes or Oberon's stupendous hat.

These two parts were handsomely enacted, and beautifully spoken, by Margaret Rawlings and Robert Helpmann; and a boy named James Kenney contributed a Puck wonderfully free from archness and Peterpannery. The clowns would have become a bore if there had been more of them; but then there wasn't, so all was well. Unquestionably the weakest element in the performance was the lamentable quality of the solo singing, which spoilt some of Purcell's best moments, and sensibly lowered the temperature of the house at the end of the first act. The chorus, on the other hand, packed like sardines into four side-boxes on the stage, sang with splendid certainty and fullness of tone: a pleasure for which, along with the vivid orchestral playing and the musical adaptation as a whole, we are indebted to Constant Lambert. In Frederick Ashton's choreography two moments stand out: a dance in which a triple echo-effect in the music is cunningly illustrated on the stage, and an airy *pas de deux* for Margot Fonteyn and Michael Somes which deservedly brought down the house.

DESMOND SHAWE-TAYLOR

RADIO NOTES

As I have said before, and shall no doubt say again, radio, as an art, aspires to the condition of opera. To grasp this is, in my view, a necessary prerequisite for transferring stage shows to the air, and partly explains why ordinary operas so often seem diffuse and undramatic, when broadcast "straight." The problem of commentary on the action has not been finally solved. The perfect solution is perhaps impossible, though Dennis Arundell nearly achieved it in some broadcasts during the war. But some kind of explanatory matter there must be, even at the cost of interruption; and in the case of D'Annunzio's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, for instance, there was altogether too little. I thought Valentine Dyall's delivery of the jewelled poetry among the best—the most expressive and scopious—efforts we have had from this fine actor; the fact that his French accent is imperfect was amply compensated by his mastery of the "tune" of French rhetorical speaking. On the stage this piece appears decadent and rather absurd, but Roland Manuel's clever adaptation makes something quite different and far more artistically satisfying out of the overdressed material. Even if this were not so, the play would have to be revived from time to time, in some form or other, for the sake of Debussy's music, which contains some of the most beautiful and imaginative pages he ever wrote. But since the words of the chorus are in the circumstances all but impossible to catch, it is essential that the contents and meaning of each scene should be clearly set out beforehand. Lacking as it was in any detailed presentation, the performance on December 7th must have seemed to many listeners extraordinarily baffling. Yet, however clear the presentation, an opera is bound to appear static on the air if the singers do not *act with their voices*. It was partly the Czech understanding of these matters which made *Dalibor* so exciting and memorable a broadcast. The unself-conscious warmth, the plastic invention and eloquence, of Smetana's operatic style, which might be described as undecorated Liszt, are so immediately attractive that one wonders why this opera is so little known outside Czechoslovakia. The performance, which was remarkably well recorded, was further distinguished by one singer of dumbfounding quality. In the name part, Beno Blachut recalled some great Russian tenor of the past—Smirnoff, or even Sobinoff. The other singers were uneven, but all sang with a fervour and conviction and genuine professional competence that made one feel one was listening to real opera for the first time in years. Repeat! Repeat!

Terence Tiller's review of David Gascoyne's poetry struck me as an excellent broadcast in its kind. His comments were directed to the conclusion, which should by now be gaining ground, that Mr. Gascoyne stands well out from the contemporary poetic scene. This he does by virtue of a masochistic self-abandonment which may not be to everyone's taste, but which is splendidly unafraid of romantic effects. In this sense his poetry has some affinity with that of Frederic Prokosch, who also avoids the fashionable vernacular in favour of a consciously poetic idiom. In the examples given, David King-Wood showed himself the ideal speaker of verse which needs a considerable degree of interpretation (in the musical sense) if it is to make itself immediately intelligible.

EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST

ROUND THE EXHIBITIONS

Thirty years ago it was thought bad taste in cultivated circles to speak too highly of English painting. Roger Fry had carried out all too thoroughly his task of demolition, and few English painters survived in the ruins that lay about him. No place was left for a national style in the greenhouses of Bloomsbury where frail, exotic flowers from the Rue du Bac were planted. It remained for a later generation, cut off from the Continent during the war years, born into intimacy with English history and the English countryside, to appreciate the special contribution this island has made to European art. Already two great painters, Constable and Turner, have been reinstated on the pedestals where they properly belong. The intimate charm which Gainsborough was the first to capture in country lanes round Ipswich, the poetry which Palmer wrested from apple orchards in Kent, have enriched our imaginative perception of nature; and now historians are busy searching in cellars and attics for Martin, Dyce, Danby, minor Pre-Raphaelites and Anglo-Impressionists. This patriotic fervour has more than a mere academic interest. Not only is it leading students along fascinating, untrodden byways, but it is reflected in the defiant Englishness of the young generation of English painters. At the Lefevre Gallery the recent works of Minton and Vaughan descend from Piper and Sutherland, who have themselves turned their backs on Paris to seek inspiration in the English romantic movement of the early nineteenth century. Even Julian Trevelyan, who in 1936 was identified with international surrealism, has since, judging by his pictures in this Exhibition, become faintly parochial. It is not possible to generalise about the virtue or vice of this new departure in English painting: to some it acts as a liberating force, to others as a halter around their necks. The effect on Minton is salutary—his sketches of wharfs and cranes in the Port of London are very direct and lively. But Keith Vaughan, who has the makings of a more impressive painter, is still too much dominated by Sutherland to give his best. His vision is that of a fish in an aquarium which, gazing mournfully out of its green tank, catches sight of the image, slightly distorted in the water, of stately human beings wandering at liberty about the room. Trevelyan is a happy child doodling with a lump of charcoal. The act of painting must afford him continuous pleasure, and in the case of No. 42 in the catalogue, profound

TOO TERRIBLE TO PRINT

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satisfaction; but he belongs to the hit-or-miss school, and if he were really conscious of the seriousness of his profession, he could not have allowed a picture like No. 33 to leave his studio.

Those who feel the need to keep in touch with the latest fashions should visit the St. George's Gallery in Grosvenor Street where a picture by Fougeron is on exhibition. Echoes of Fougeron's fame have already reached these shores, but this I believe is the first of his works actually to hazard the journey to London. We islanders are not in the mood at present to take kindly to him: just as the French have received with polite indifference our new romanticism, so do we feel unprepared to profit from their stern medievalism. Instead, we take not wholly creditable refuge in two drawings of elephants, precious as Persian miniatures, by that rare artist, David Jones; a small still-life by Braque; a beautiful nude drawing by Bérard in the manner of Picasso's "blue" period; and a circus scene by Chagall. The words "pretty" and "trivial" can be used synonymously to describe most of the remaining pictures and drawings hanging on these walls.

At the Berkeley Galleries visitors will find a varied and interesting collection of the art of primitive peoples.

BENEDICT NICOLSON

THE MOVIES

"Song of the South," at the New Gallery
"13 Rue Madeleine," at the Tivoli
"The Razor's Edge," at the Odeon, Marble Arch

Going round a toy-shop, one may notice that, while many things are back, they are not as they were. The lead soldiers want faces, the roadster is perfect except that it doesn't go. So with Mr. Disney. Very much his time of year, and *Song of the South* caters minimally. That is to say, it goes in more for "real" people and scenery than for cartoon; Uncle Remus becomes the excuse for a musical about the South; there is a chirpy 1946 tune sung by faithful old darkies and children in velveteens; the few cartoon animals (Brers Rabbit, Fox and Bear) look already as though they had reached the pages of the children's serial, and the technicolor landscape is ready to be cut into jigsaws: here in fact, all marketing and no magic, is the new Disney foreshadowed by his last two pieces. While the *maestro* himself sportively hunts leprechauns in Eire, we may shrug our shoulders or lament the collapse into vulgarity of what was once the freshest fun on a screen.

But one can't just dismiss *Song of the South*—with the cabaret show and the travelogue that preceded it—as a seasonal big yawn. The disconcerting fact is that Disney is not in the least off-colour, that he has worked and experimented in precisely this direction. *Fantasia* was the end of one line of experiment—that of imaginative pattern. He has turned since from the abstract to the all-too-human. What has been the most obvious shortcoming of the Disney cartoon world? The failure to present one likeable human being; a remedy for which would seem to be better draughtsmanship. Possibly Disney lacked the draughtsmen; he preferred, in any case, to attempt another method—which a truer artist would have rejected at once—that of combining live actors with animated drawings. With this object he has experimented laboriously, and the results are as foretold: all the fun has gone out of caricature, all the flesh-and-blood out of people. To anyone remembering the Silly Symphonies and the best passages of *Pinocchio* or *Fantasia* it will be painful to see the Negro actor of the present film walking along and singing a popular number to a fey bluebird superimposed on his shoulder. The song, needless to say, is something about a bluebird sitting on your shoulder. And the half-dozen or less Uncle Remus stories that do from time to time emerge in cartoon are both feeble and raucous. Does this represent the end, not of Mr. Disney's capacity for invention, but of an inherently fruitless line of experiment? I hope so, but looking round at the Mickey picture-books and the Seven Dwarf statue I am not at all sure.

13 Rue Madeleine is a documentary thriller on the lines of *The House on 42nd Street*. A March of Time voice instructs us in the school for secret agents, and the special mission to Holland proves exciting and relentless. The drop into enemy territory, the link-up with patriots, the bombing of Gestapo headquarters acquire a new precision in thrills. Henry Hathaway's direction and James Cagney's dapper toughness as a leading agent lift this film well above the usual level of thrillers.

The subject of Mr. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* is—perhaps I need hardly say—spiritual search. Out of the American boom of the Twenties comes a young man who is not content to walk into a business partnership and a love match, but sets out to resolve an inner conflict by knocking about Paris, working in a mine, visiting a Buddhist saint, living in a mountain fastness, and returning with the conflict part-solved to the casual world he has quitted. The film, directed by Edmund Goulding, squarely faces this theme: we are rewarded by a tension of idea and character, by more wisdom than has glowed out of Hollywood in a twelve-month, and by the continuous but not unsympathetic realism of the book. The acting (especially Clifton Webb's tasteful snob) usually keeps up with the dialogue. Much to be grateful for; and the film, though a long one, never loses its grip. But—this is not to insist too much on the original—there are snags. The "I" of the novel becomes Maugham himself, in the person of Mr. Herbert Marshall, and his slopey-sleepy presence, animated at times by a darting glance, will hardly do. He sandbags our attention where the book offered its sharp reminiscent style. Then Mr. Tyrone Power lacks the personality to suggest spiritual force (a fault, though more ingeniously skirted, in the original). Then, while the surroundings of a rich life are well enough depicted, the excursions outside it—to Paris bistros and Himalayan temples—alas, are not. A sunrise in the mountains is meant to convey Revelation: and there is something incurably Disneyish in that.

WILLIAM WHITEBAIT

Correspondence

MR. ATTLEE AND RUSSIA

SIR,—Surely the inference to be drawn from Mr. Pritt's account of his successful trip to U.S.S.R. and Mr. Winterton's account of an unsuccessful reception by *British Ally*, an officially sponsored organ of British propaganda, is that Mr. Pritt, representing the private Society for Cultural Relations, has found a more effective means of stimulating Soviet interest in English life than the Foreign-Office-controlled Press Department of the British Embassy in Moscow, whose relations with the Russians are bound to be affected by the fluctuations in diplomatic relations. In fact, of course, Mr. Winterton selected an extreme example which does not give a fair picture of the Press Departments relations with the Russians. There is room for both the official and the unofficial approach.

Some misunderstanding might be removed if it were more widely known that the Soviet authorities have deliberately chosen to broaden the ordinary citizens' knowledge of the world by first preparing specialists. It is to these teachers and future teachers who, in surprisingly large numbers, are studying English life, and to the institutes where they work that the large quantities of English books which the Russians are known to be purchasing in England, are going. Hence the detailed knowledge of English institutions that Mr. Pritt and other visitors have found here, in those circles whose function it is to write, teach or lecture. It is, I suggest, still too early to expect to see the results of their work on the ordinary citizen, although it is surely worth something that so large a proportion of Russian school-children are to-day learning English. It is a long time since

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BEST BAKERS BAKE IT

Mr. Winterton left the U.S.S.R., and he appears to be limited for his information to the Soviet press and travellers' tales.

Not, it appears, very reliable tales, either. I took the trouble to enquire from the only one of the two girls, whose adventures in Georgia he describes, who is at present in Moscow, and learnt that what Mr. Winterton describes as arrest was an incident with a tactless official. She flatly denies there was any arrest or that her Russian friend in Moscow "disappeared!" as Mr. Winterton would have us believe. It should also be noted that since the Soviet authorities removed wartime restrictions on travel, foreigners in Moscow—yes, even correspondents, Mr. Winterton—have travelled widely in European and Asiatic Russia without any more discomfort than that which is to be expected in a country hard-hit by the war.

Moscow. RALPH PARKER

THE SOUL OF THE LABOUR PARTY

SIR,—Mr. Aidan Crawley's political sympathisers cannot be very pleased with him for letting the cat out of the bag. In addition to your criticisms, it may be pointed out that his position is pure MacDonaldism. This reduction of Socialism to a mere "progressive limitation of private rights in the wider interest of the individual," to be brought about by "trial and error" and with due regard to "continuity," was advocated forty years ago by MacDonald in *Socialism and Society*. We know where it led him. Will it lead the Bevins and the Crawleys to the same end?

The fact is that on the MacDonald theory there can be no need for a Labour Party at all. If all that is needed is the application of "liberal and Christian philosophy" to social problems, why not leave it to the Liberal and Tory Parties? The fact that there *is* a Labour Party—that the organised workers have had to fight the capitalist parties in the political field—is itself a conclusive proof of the Marxist thesis that all history is the history of class struggles.

The much-bandied phrase "Liberal Socialism" would have made the pioneers of the Labour Movement gasp. To men like Hyndman, Morris, Bax, and Keir Hardie, Liberalism was the enemy. As for the idea that Social-Democrats should line up with capitalists to resist "Marxist aggression," one wishes these old stalwarts could rise from the dead to do justice to it! Social-Democracy in their day meant, in fact, Marxism. The question by what political machinery Socialism was to be brought about was to them one of expediency. If Hyndman opposed the Bolsheviks, it was not on "Liberal" principles, but because their revolution came in the middle of a war which he supported. The idea that Parliamentary means alone must be used to further Socialism is a new-fangled superstition which we owe to the influence of the late unlamented MacDonald.

It is symptomatic of Mr. Crawley's lack of realism that he contrives to dismiss the possibility of American capitalism menacing the peace of the world without even mentioning the atomic bomb. No one would gather from his article that at this very moment American and British reactionaries are agitating for a "preventive" war on the Soviet Union. That, and not "Marxist aggression," is the danger which Socialists have to meet, and to which the "rebels" seem to be more alive than Mr. Crawley and his friends. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

53 Victoria Road, Oxford.

PARCELS FOR GERMANY

SIR,—That the need for immediate relief action in Germany is imperative is now generally recognised, and whilst it is clear that no adequate improvement in conditions can be effected without a change in governmental and inter-governmental policies, the importance of individual efforts in supplying both material and intellectual aid cannot be over-emphasised.

The National Peace Council is aware of the urgent need for both food and clothing. It is also aware that the need for books and periodicals—for information and for the stimulus of mental and spiritual contacts with the outside world—is equally urgent.

For this reason the Council has issued a leaflet: *Germany—what can be sent and how*, giving details of the various schemes now available for the relief of the physical and intellectual destitution of Germany and, in particular, of the British Zone. We shall be pleased to send a copy to any of your readers on application. GERALD BAILEY,

National Peace Council, Director

144 Southampton Row, W.C.1.

THE BRITISH ZONE

SIR,—The fears expressed in Mr. Gollancz's article in your current issue that there would be further godless destruction of useful plant in the British Zone were but confirmed by the answers given by the Chancellor of the Duchy in the House of Commons on December 11. He even admitted that the Blohm and Voss sawmill and turbine repair shop, both, as Gollancz said, essential to Hamburg's peacetime economy, are to be taken for reparations. *Hansard* further reveals that nine plants are in process of being dismantled while a further 51 are allocated for reparations. Among the plants are Schiess Defries who make the best horizontal boring machines in the world—the use of which is very common in the heavy engineering industry in this country; and Mathes & Weber who, as Mr. Gollancz states, are one of the two factories in the British Zone manufacturing soda. Without soda, you can't make soap, and as I said in the House of Commons, even Potsdam did not contemplate that the Germans should never wash again.

But there is worse yet: on December 3rd, at a Press Conference of the Cologne Chamber of Industry and Commerce, it was given out that important machine tool plants in the industrial area of Cologne are to be dismantled. The factories concerned are: Alfred J. Schutte, A.G., which, apart from Pickler in Leipzig (Russian zone) is the only plant in Germany producing multi-spindle automatics; Hermann Kolb, which is the only firm in the British Zone producing a special type of drilling machine since the Hetter tool machine factory was destroyed and put on the dismantling list; Maier Roth & Pastor, producing chain welding machines for the mining industry and also wire and masts; and Mueller & Schwamborn, the only firm in the British Zone producing wire rope machinery for the mining industry. With regard to the last named, we ourselves are already short of wire rope in this country and, as a manufacturer of equipment requiring large quantities of wire rope, I am experiencing the greatest difficulty in getting our requirements met. Are we now going to have to curtail our own supplies to our own works still further in order to keep the German winding engines of the coal mines properly equipped with winding rope, because somebody wants to take their rope-making plants?

On top of all this insanity, at the same moment as the British News Service in Cologne was giving out this information, the following announcement was made:—

> "Reliable reports from British H.Q. in Germany claim to-day that orders have been given for the suspension of all 'reparations dismantling' of German equipment in the British Zone. No official confirmation could be obtained of these reports, wires the B.U.P. correspondent of British H.Q."

This surely would seem to indicate that the reparations elephant goes trundling on regardless of what may be either politically or economically desirable. Cannot a stop be put to this paralysing dismantling?

House of Commons. R. R. STOKES

SIR,—From the campaign for the appointment of a Minister of Cabinet rank resident in the British Zone

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CORUNDITE PLUGS

one could get the impression that such a step would largely solve our troubles. If, *e.g.*, one accepts that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is insufficiently informed about conditions in Germany (as Mr. Gollancz seems to suggest, one might think (as Mr. Boothby obviously does) that this would be different if the Chancellor were to reside in Germany.

Yet, the nature of the Control Commission makes it more difficult for its heads to obtain the necessary information than is the case in any other Government Department. However, many civilians there may be in it, it remains a military administration. Government in any democratic country is subject to public and parliamentary criticism—military administrations like the Control Commission are not.

In war, commanders and military administrators can fairly easily be judged by their success or failure. In the Control Commission, however, cases of incompetence, maladministration and abuse of power are by far more difficult to detect and more difficult to remedy.

In other words, the Control Commission combines the shortcomings and disadvantages of both, a government not subject to the control of the people and an army not tes ted in battle.

It is furthermore small wonder that in the process of upwards filtering through the "official channels" quite a number of aspects and facts get lost or reach the top too slowly.

There would appear to be four remedies :—

(1) Montgomery's system of a small number of personal liaison officers proved very successful in the war. I believe that such officers would be equally useful now to the Military Governor and the responsible Minister.
(2) Increased interest of British Press and Parliament in affairs in Germany.
(3) Increased licence of the German Press to criticise the effects of measures of the Control Commission. This makes a careful scrutiny of the German Press particularly important.
(4) One may even think of letting copies of the more important reports and memoranda of both Control Commission and German authorities (from the medium level upwards) be sent to the Military Governor's and Minister's offices.

The first and the last suggestion should not be interpreted as a sign of distrust in the present administration. They are substitutes for the information gained by other Government Departments from public criticism to which they are subject to a so much greater extent than the Control Commission.

Unless additional sources of information thus become accessible to the Minister, he may be almos t as badly off in Germany as he is alleged to be in London

33 Lyonsdown Ave., Barnet, Herts. MICHAEL A. THOMAS

POINTS AND BREAD

SIR,—If "Critic" had been present at the Labour Party Annual Women's Conference at Hastings in October, and heard the denunciation by working women from all over the country of the ramp then going on in the working of the "B.U. into points" scheme, he might modify his views as to its popularity.

I hold no brief for the Ministry of Food. Administratively, the bread rationing scheme seems to me badly conceived, in that it is unnecessarily burdensome for the housewife and the retailer who have to work it; and the points-exchange scheme definitely seemed to favour those already in a privileged position, from the food angle.

Crudely as it is put by the Ministry, it is surely true that, by and large, the B.U. points-exchange scheme tended to favour the large family and was unfair on small households, since clearly foods are on points just because they are available only in limited quantities.

The large family is likely to consist of (a) a number of earners who "eat out"; (b) some manual workers and/or adolescents, who get extra B.U.s; (c) possibly some schoolchildren who in many places can get a very hearty mid-day school-meal; (d) above all, "Mum," or someone like her, who, with a fair amount of money to handle, is available to spend hours and hours exchanging—if one can believe what one hears in the queue—breath-taking numbers of B.U.s (which made Mr. Strachey's "average of 5 extra points per person" look silly, until one heard the other side of the story), and subsequently searching the shops for points foods.

For the small household, the single woman or man, living alone, the widow with dependent children, at work all day, with no one to do their shopping, elderly people, unable to shove in the endless queues, there was only what was left when—as was said at Hastings—the birds of prey had finished, which was often nothing. Almost universally, people complained that the woman with 5 or 6 books had a very unfair advantage.

May I give just one example, of the unfortunate working of the system? A little middle-aged woman of my acquaintance, of very modest appetite, brought up as one of a family of 13, on the father's 27*s.* a week wage, lives alone, and works in the morning as an office-cleaner, and in the afternoon as a domestic worker. On a wage of 1*s.* 6*d.* an hour, she has, because of distances, to have her dinner out. She has to take sandwiches for her "elevenses." Sandwiches cut into bread, as we know, and she needs one small loaf per day—2 B.U.s. Not being classed as a "manual worker"—presumably because Sir Martin Roseveare and Co. have never seen a woman scrub or polish—she receives 9 B.U.s per week—4 small loaves and one "French," as she says. It is not enough. A cereal or porridge, bought out of her 32 monthly points, would enable her to do without bread for breakfast or supper. But she hasn't time to shop-crawl and, because of the exchange-scheme, by the time she got there, the cupboard was bare.

Thinking round the problem, is it not the case that the bases of privilege in the old Capitalist World—money, leisure, service—are still, under our present system, the bases of privilege, though on a smaller-scale and working in a somewhat different way?

L. L'ESTRANGE MALONE

36 Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.1.

THE LASKI CASE

Sir,—I have read with great disappointment and dismay and sometimes with disgust the report of the libel case which Professor Laski has brought against the publishers of the *Newark Advertiser*.

Those who have read his writings find in them a wealth of human sympathy for the sufferings of ordinary men and women and a burning desire to alleviate them. He has never used the word revolution in the sense of a mass upheaval by organised violence, but as a great social change which can often be brought by consent. No one in England to-day is a more uncompromising champion of the liberties of mankind than Professor Laski. Indeed, if our liberties are to be preserved and their benefits extended to all those who have been excluded from them so far, capitalism must voluntarily abdicate itself. That has been the constant theme of his writings. He has time and again emphasised that the danger of violence would come from the privileged classes who would resist an attack on their vested interests and not from a government dominated by a socialist ideology. He is remembered throughout the progressive sections of mankind as one of the most distinguished political philosophers of our times, an intellectual giant who has left his indelible mark on our generation.

Among all the intellectuals, university teachers and professors I have met, I have found him the most courteous and tolerant of the views that differ from his own. I therefore, with thousands of other people who respect and admire him, bitterly resent the attacks on his unimpeachable character. Your appeal for the fund that is now being raised to defray the cost of the suit, it is hoped, will meet with a magnanimous response. It will be a measure of our affection for the man and his ideas.

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COLLINS

BOOKS IN GENERAL

CONSIDERING the precious material they include, it is odd that the appearance of the *Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle* created comparatively so brief a stir among discerning English readers. To-day, I believe, those beautifully produced, massive, red-clad volumes fetch up to a hundred guineas on the open book-market; but they are treasured in the vaults of the London Library; and few literary experiences are more rewarding than to spend a couple of hours immersed in the pages of Boswell's "curious archives," the record of his thoughts and doings from youth to middle age, where every detail is noted down with painstaking, sometimes painful, even agonized, exactitude—his pieties and his infidelities, his dreams and his speculations, his meetings with the great and his adventures in the *demi-monde*. "I have a kind of strange feeling (their author once observed) as if I wished nothing to be secret that concerns myself." Like many of Boswell's feelings, it was an impulse he could not explain; but evidently he had an eye for the future, and expected that the chronicle he had compiled would be of the highest interest to posterity. He was right. Thanks to his habit of diligent journalizing—begun during the "most foolish period of my life, viz., from twenty-one to twenty-three," when he had already "got into an excellent method of taking down conversations"—Boswell's career is now more fully documented than that of almost any other human being in the whole extent of European literature. We know more of him, for example, than we know of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; for, while Jean-Jacques lived in a dream-world of imaginary persecution, and his account of his later life has a lurid controversial background, one of Boswell's finest traits was that he harboured no enduring grievances, and one of his greatest virtues that he had a passion for truth, revealed now in his astonishing inquisitiveness, now in his lofty determination "*savoir tout au fond*," which impelled him to such diverse experiments as arguing and expostulating with David Hume upon his death-bed, visiting a sheep-stealer in the condemned cell, or paying a visit to the notorious Mrs. Rudd, an adventuress universally renowned for "address and insinuation." By indefatigable probing he hoped that one day he might yet arrive at knowledge, and might establish some moral and intellectual equilibrium between the various phases of his own character that tormented and bewildered him. His efforts were never crowned with success; but during the struggle he completed his masterpiece and composed a self-portrait that, from certain points of view, seems quite as memorable a production as his biography of Samuel Johnson.

Was he not, I have sometimes wondered, in his own way at least as remarkable a personage? But any opinion of the respective worth of Johnson and his satellite is bound to be coloured—perhaps coloured very strongly—by the standards that one applies in estimating human character. If one demands personal dignity and insists on solid worth—if one looks for a tale of sufferings calmly borne or difficulties bravely mastered—James Boswell must go overboard. He was not dignified: he was not heroic: and, though always a romantic snob and intensely conscious of the position he had inherited as prospective laird of Auchinleck, he was never averse from abandoning dignity and jettisoning decency if they stood in the way of some delightful new experience—an addition to his knowledge of life that he felt he deserved and needed. What was decency compared with knowledge, with the charm of new ideas, the appeal of fresh sensations? True, his abounding thirst for his life very often drove him along crooked, dismal by-paths; but he was invariably anxious to confess his fault; and his recognition of the errors he had committed, and of the remorse he was piling up, bears little resemblance to the tedious complaints of the conventionally contrite sinner. In the midst of debauchery he had an exceptionally lucid vision; and, however fiercely his passions shook him, however miserably he raged over the manifold absurdities and iniquities of some unaccountably fascinating, but vulgar and "rompish," mistress, he would still pause to note the effect of the emotional earthquake upon his private seismograph.

Admitted that his lucidity was uncommon, Boswell's behaviour (his critics point out) was frequently ridiculous: his instability proved his undoing: some while before his untimely death he had become an inveterate drunkard. Yet, although the fruits of his lucidity remain, whereas the consequences of his misbehaviour (which hurt no one so much as it hurt himself) have long ago evaporated, some historians still cherish the belief that as often as James Boswell takes his stand before them it is essential that they should rap loudly on their desks and begin to play the schoolmaster. Here, for instance, is Mr. Vulliamy, who, having suggested in a previous volume that Boswell was actually mad—otherwise he would not have drunk so deeply or treated a patient wife so badly—now returns to the usher's throne in a book called *Ursa Major*,* which, besides some informative Johnsonian essays, contains a variety of tart reproofs for members of Johnson's circle. Mr. Vulliamy's detestation of Mrs. Thrale is boundless; but of Boswell, who also disliked her, he can find little good to say; and, far from having been softened by a study of the Malahide papers, he remarks that Macaulay's caricature, if "in some ways imperfect" and in other ways "distorted," is nevertheless "radically true," an assertion he proceeds to back up by reeling off the long familiar list of Boswell's moral shortcomings. Suppose we object that his victim, once described by Johnson as "a man whom everybody likes," was generally esteemed by other contemporaries a pleasant, good-humoured fellow?—

> . . . Later impressions (snaps Mr. Vulliamy) were often, if not usually, different. Anna Seward spoke of Boswell as "an ungrateful impudent man, capable of insulting any person who cannot inflict the punishment of corporal correction." The opinion of Hannah More was the same, and was probably the result of a similar experience: "I was heartily disgusted with Mr. Boswell, who came upstairs after dinner, much disordered with wine, and addressed me in a manner which drew from me a sharp rebuke."

It is somewhat surprising to see Mr. Vulliamy preferring the opinion of two blue-legged geese, the Misses Seward and More, to that of Dr. Johnson, a man exceedingly sensitive to the niceties of human character and awfully censorious of any character that did not please him. But moral homilies are really beside the point; for, whether well or ill founded, they are not what we require of the biographer and literary critic, who is concerned with moral attributes only in so far as they affect the shaping of an artist's lifework. If his vices are to be stigmatised, Boswell's vices and virtues, it is fair to add, were closely interwoven. Had he been less unstable, he would have been less impressionable. Had his thirst for experience been less greedy, would he have developed into one of the finest observers and recorders of his own or any other period? Moreover he had one virtue—a virtue both moral and intellectual—that Mr. Vulliamy somehow fails to celebrate: the honesty of his attitude towards himself. It was a quality he managed to preserve through all his devious wanderings.

Honesty of this type—the gift of detachment and a capacity for periodic self-examination—seems necessary to the accomplishment of any decisive feat of literature. Boswell had it, and wrote the *Life of Johnson*. He wrote, too, the brilliant sketches of his meetings with Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau and lesser-known personages, including, of course, "the celebrated Mrs. Rudd," which, if gathered into a single volume, might rival, though they could never eclipse, the *Life* in popularity. Johnson, on the other hand, a man of far more massive intellect, with a prose style as stately and harmonious as Boswell's, even at his best, was often weak and slipshod, has left behind him a series of majestic fragments—some of the *Lives of the Poets*, many passages from *Rasselas* and his miscellaneous writings—but no *magnum opus* in which his genius is summed up. It cannot be said that he was lacking in self-knowledge: but there were depths of his mind, abysses of his memory, that he very seldom dared to penetrate. He had immense dignity: the front that he showed the world resembled a towering Roman façade, overgrown but still splendid like a palace-wall depicted in one of Piranesi's etchings. Through its portals rolled a voice of solemn eloquence, of thunderous denunciation and no less thunderous mockery. But behind the façade? . . . Boswell suspected, and Mrs. Thrale learned to her cost during the progress of an intimacy which continued more than fifteen years, that the nether regions were dark and troubled, a place of torment and gloom where their friend writhed in the grip of intolerable private musings. He dreaded damnation, shuddered at the thought of death and from youth to old age never lost his fear of madness. Besides, he was hag-ridden by a perpetual sense of sin and by the "Secret far dearer than Life" which he had divulged to Mrs. Thrale and to no other human being. Hence his extraordinary inconsistencies, the explosions of prejudice and petulance, that were apt to burst with eruptive effect through the flood of his conversation. Hence the profound sloth and habitual melancholy that crippled the exercise of his magnificent creative powers. In an illuminating chapter, Mr. Vulliamy seeks to analyse the various neuroses from which Johnson evidently suffered, and the condition of hypochondria, named "the English Malady," that afflicted Johnson and Boswell alike, though the remedies they applied to it and the results that it produced in them were strikingly dissimilar. Boswell being of slighter build, the conduct of his life presented less alarming problems. A strain of volatility helped him through: his darkest moods were suddenly dissipated by a flash of natural levity: he put on a new and gaudy garment, fell to ogling an attractive neighbour, or called for a second bottle. Once again his weakness was his strength. The pliant Boswellian reed was, in some respects, more enduring than the stricken Johnsonian oak.

By contrast to the severe and pedagogic demeanour adopted by Mr. C. E. Vulliamy, Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis's biographical method is rollicking and uninhibited. *The Hooded Hawk*,† I am glad to say, is an enthusiastic tribute to Boswell's numerous virtues—his warm heartedness, his abounding cheerfulness, his genius for acquiring friends and the benevolence he showed towards a succession of pathetic *protégés*, among others an English woman convict and the forlorn Scottish sheep-stealer whose desperate cause he championed. Mr. Wyndham Lewis has made good use of the riches of the Malahide papers, and is indebted to Boswell's journals for many long and vivid episodes. Eighteenth-century London provides a profusion of local colour with which to splash his backcloth; and the book contains much incidental information about the place and period that Boswell's future biographers may find extremely serviceable. But he, too, alas, has a hobby-horse—the Roman Catholic faith; and ever and anon he bestrides its saddle and goes careering off into spirited irrelevancy. Boswell unquestionably flirted with Catholicism. But, since, in fact, he did not join the Church, why bother us with speculations as to the beneficial consequences that might or might not have ensued if he had ever crossed the border-line? Nor does Johnson escape. It is interesting to speculate what would have been the response of that belligerent Anglican if he could have seen himself described on page 164 as *anima naturaliter catholica!*

PETER QUENNELL

* *Ursa Major*. By C. E. VULLIAMY. *M. Joseph*, 15s.

† *The Hooded Hawk or The Case of Mr. Boswell*. By D. B. WYNDHAM LEWIS. *Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 12s 6d.

MONTY

Montgomery. By ALAN MOORHEAD. *Hamish Hamilton.* 12s. 6d.

Biographies of living celebrities are usually written either by the "gentleman with the duster" or the "gentleman with the whitewash." Alan Moorhead has avoided both these extremes. Knowing Monty really well, and admiring him passionately, he has composed a character study of real importance. He expounds the legend with conviction, but he also analyses it with objectivity. Very wisely he makes no attempt to assess the qualities of Montgomery the general—that must be left to the military historians. Even in describing the campaigns, he concentrates on a portrait of the man, leaving the battles and their planning as a lightly sketched background.

Inevitably, the earlier chapters, because they contain much new material, make more interesting reading. We knew the legend already and since Moorhead is content to describe his hero through the eyes of a member of the *entourage*, he does little more in the latter half of his book than provide a most useful counterpart to Butcher's diary of "Life With Ike." Of course Moorhead's chapters are far better written, and they therefore give a sharper and probably a more accurate picture of Monty in 21 A.G. than Butcher could give of Ike in SHAEF. Read together, the two books should provide the serious historian with sufficient material to form a correct assessment of the personal relationships of these two remarkable men throughout the three campaigns. At present such an assessment is impossible. Every Englishman who cares enough to have an opinion is irrevocably and personally committed to one or the other. So violent was the contrast between the atmospheres of the two headquarters and the characters of their commanders that impartiality, even in retrospect, is impossible. Moorhead tries desperately hard to be fair to Alexander and Eisenhower, but his loyalty is too strong for him. He feels that the war should have been fought as Monty would have fought it if he had been left alone, and he can see virtues in the Higher Command only in so far as it permitted this to happen. Anyone who writes from the other side exhibits an equal and opposite bias, seeing Monty as the man who made life difficult for Alex and Ike. That these passionate disagreements still live on after the war is in itself the finest tribute to the leadership of the allied forces. Montgomery, Eisenhower and Alexander all won wholehearted loyalty from their staffs and each created his own individual legend. These legends, both Anglo-American and British, were a vital factor in the final victory.

Moorhead however does a great deal more than perpetuate a legend. He writes the gospel, not according to St. John, but to St. Luke. He anatomises and explains, selecting his stories not merely to glorify but to illustrate a central theme. His Monty is a man whose greatness is the creature of heredity, moulded by the frustrations of childhood. Without those frustrations, he might have escaped not only from his defects—intellectual arrogance and a streak of sadistic self-assertion—but from his virtues of single-mindedness and intellectual concentration. Montgomery's character is yet another proof that greatness in a leader is not, as Aristotle believed, a mean between an excess and a defect of emotion. It was precisely his emotional lopsidedness which made him a superb commander of men; his lack of any inner centre of tranquillity—other than confidence in his own ability—which gave him his unique capacity for getting his way with his superiors and winning the confidence of his army. This surely makes Moorhead's comparison of Montgomery and Gandhi fantastically inconsistent with the rest of the book. Monty loved his saintly father, but took after his mother (a daughter of Dean Farrar, married to his curate at the age of 16), against whose domination he fought throughout his childhood. From Moorhead's own analysis, it is clear that Monty's religion is an expression of his personality and not something to which personality is subordinated. If Moorhead had studied the careers of Dean Farrar's other children, he might have found a further clue to the character of Mrs. Montgomery, and of Monty himself, which would have prevented him from suggesting that there is anything of the mystic in this man of action.

But the picture of the Montgomery family will remain a model of discriminating biography. Equally illuminating are the pages on the cadet at Sandhurst, who found it funny to set a light to the shirt-tails of an unpopular book-worm; the tragic episode of his marriage which nearly softened him into humanity; and the scenes in Egypt where he was only just saved from himself by the understanding shown by two superior officers, Burnett-Stuart and Pile. These brilliant illuminations make one regret that Moorhead was unable to include similar material on the Field Marshal's role in the campaign of 1914, when he served the only six weeks of his life as a regimental soldier, in Ireland during the period of the Black and Tans, and in Palestine, where he was in control of the Haifa area in 1938 during the Arab Revolt. One can only hope that in a second and enlarged edition Moorhead will fill in these gaps and so turn a sketch into a full-scale portrait. No-one else could do it half as well and it would be a tragedy if the task were left to an official biographer.

In November 1945, Montgomery received an honorary degree at St. Andrews. In his speech he made a remarkably objective analysis of his own qualities:

> In history the military leader has frequently been tempted and frequently succumbed to the temptation to aspire to political leadership. The whole training and experience of the soldier is to take direct action down certain well-defined lines, and he has in his hands a military machine which responds immediately and with precision to his touch. The politician is trained in subtlety in debate, in weighing up the conflicting interests of his supporters, and finally in compromise; and the Government is much less precise or exact than the military, and is much more liable to deviation in highly skilled political hands.

It remains to be seen whether the role of a C.I.G.S. is that of a politician or of a military leader.

R. H. S. CROSSMAN

A MORALIST

Late Harvest. By NORMAN DOUGLAS. *Lindsay Drummond.* 8s. 6d.

Scholars of the future—if there be any such—will be saved much exacting research and some enjoyable speculation by *Late Harvest*, in which Mr. Norman Douglas offers comments and annotations upon seventeen of his books. He tells us where they were written, corrects misprints and mistakes, divagates into racy table-talk on a variety of subjects, reprints delightfully characteristic descriptions of Ischia and the Ponza Islands, adds a few lethal reviews, and rounds the slimmish volume off with an index compact of wit. At least one of his works he passes unnoticed, an anthology of five-line poems, mostly anonymous and not previously printed.

Among the matters he treats are the asphodel, an "ubiquitous calamity" which even the destructive goat refuses to devour; the delights of smoking hashish (among which he does not mention what I have found most characteristic—its intensification of the sense of humour, making one giggle at the mildest incident); Hudson Lowe's "ignoble surrender of Capri to the French"; the Fascist passion for destroying ancient monuments; and the character of D. H. Lawrence—"one of those mortals to whom one must never show kindness unless one wants to be stabbed in the back afterwards." He offers hints to writers:

> *But*, often unavoidable, is none the less the most misused and debilitating monosyllable in our language. Try the experiment, and you will discover that a written passage is apt to grow more emphatic in proportion as "buts" are removed. . .

Admirable advice. And all writers should emulate his care in placing "only" next the word it qualifies: not one writer in a hundred troubles to do this. On the other hand, it is astonishing to find Mr. Douglas defending the use of "like" as a conjunction. (Shakespeare does this: those of us who are not Shakespeare were wise to refrain.) Then there are exacting demands upon that sour, sweated, scrannel parasite, the reviewer:

> He must have a knowledge of life, of men and their ways, a fair dose of personal worldly experience—the requisite outfit, in fact. That is what they sometimes lack, and it accounts for a certain thinness, a certain anaemic quality in their appraisals. . . Reviewers might also raise the art to a higher level by refusing to write for the half-civilised, by treating them as non-existent.

We are not told how a reviewer, unless he has a private income, is to procure a "requisite outfit" that is so costly; and, if he treats the half-civilised as non-existent, he will disqualify himself for the plums, so few, so succulent, so indigestible, that dangle on the walls of Fleet Street.

Alone is the book of his that Mr. Douglas prefers. Deferentially I agree. I have a great taste also for *They Went*.

> *Theophilus:* that was the original title which the then publishers changed into the present cheap and nasty one for the purposes of publicity, I suppose. They cannot have objected on principle to a proper name as a book-title, since it was they who published *Nicholas Nickleby* and those others. I never see the words *They Went* without a little feeling of nausea.

South Wind, he tells us,

> was the result of my craving to escape from the wearisome actualities of life. To picture yourself living in a society of such instability, of such "jovial immoderation" and "frolicsome perversity" that even a respectable bishop can be persuaded to approve of a murder—this was my aim.

South Wind was the first book by Mr. Douglas that I read (I was directed to it by a review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which, years later, I found had been written by Virginia Woolf). Since then I have read, and re-read, everything I could find from his pen. Among living Englishmen only Mr. E. M. Forster and Sir Max Beerbohm rival him in sagacity, humour and urbanity. (Curious that each of these has for long all but given up the practice of the art in which he excels: we are deprived cruelly, while admitting that many even better writers would have done well to show the same self-restraint.) None of them, one notices, has attained anything approaching the popularity of Wells and Arnold Bennett and Galsworthy, whose later and weaker works might have failed to attract if they had not given the public what it likes best in a novel—adultery garnished with moralising. Though Mr. Forster, Mr. Douglas, and even Sir Max are moralists, they never purvey the right mixture of undogmatic religion and high-minded carnality. Mr. Douglas is an Epicurean in the modern sense of the term: like Epicurus, he hates gods; unlike him, he exalts enjoyment.

> If one has enjoyed life and contrived to extract matter for mirth even out of its not infrequent mishaps, one cannot be said to have squandered one's days. A man's days are his own. He will do well, I should think, not to listen to others as to whether he has wasted his life or not; that is his own concern.

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It is in similar terms that Mr. Douglas explains his devotion to scholarship: "Knowledge is power, they say. Knowledge is not only power but good fun."

If Mr. Douglas had been French, he would have waxed into one of the official glories of his nation, a member of the Academy and a best-seller. His feeling for Nature in her Mediterranean guise has led him to much the same philosophy that Anatole France, inveterately bookish, gained from Horace, Montaigne, Voltaire and Renan. In the English climate this hedonism, sunny, fatalistic, with an undercurrent even of pessimism, makes no popular appeal. Like Gibbon, Peacock and Fitz-Gerald, Mr. Douglas is a minority man, an aristocrat of the intellect. In the world of Sartre and Mr. Koestler he may moreover seem merely a lingering survival of a species almost extinct. Those of us, however, who still believe with the Utilitarians that pleasure is the best criterion of morality, must consider him all the more valuable because his doctrine is now so irrationally out of fashion.

RAYMOND MORTIMER

POEMS AND ATTITUDES

Poems from New Writing, 1936–1946. Selected with a foreword by JOHN LEHMANN. *Lehmann.* 8*s.* 6*d.*

The Lamp. By RICHARD CHURCH. *Dent.* 6*s.*

The Soldier. By CONRAD AIKEN. *Editions Poetry London.* 4*s.* 6*d.*

Outlaw of the Lowest Planet. By KENNETH PATCHEN. Selected and introduced by DAVID GASCOYNE. *Grey Walls Press.* 8*s.* 6*d.*

Perennial. By OLIVER ST. JOHN GOGARTY. *Constable.* 7*s.* 6*d.*

Desert Wells. By DOROTHY WELLESLEY. *Joseph.* 6*s.*

Gold Khan and other Siberian Legends. Translated by NORMAN COHN. With a Preface by ARTHUR WALEY. *Secker and Warburg.* 12*s.* 6*d.*

It was not till 1929, eleven years after the first World War, that Harold Monro's anthology, *Twentieth Century Poetry*, made its appearance. Looked back to now, it has nearly all the attractions and virtues: the writers who should be are there; there one will find the certainties, the promising starts, the contemporaries who have belonged before dropping out; a future is implied in which Eliot and Hopkins, bracketed memorably for the first time, emerge as leaders; and less definably, everywhere, the reader is made to feel that, while receiving exact guidance, his own inclinations will be involved and given weight.

The taste-forming value of such an anthology can hardly be exaggerated; one feels the need of another Monro to-day. At the moment a long indiscriminate flutter round, on the part of writers and public, is coming to an end. People already read less and, war being ended, there will be no poetry of relief to excite a second flutter. Eleven years, so far as poetry is concerned, will be far too long to wait again before making up our minds and having them made up for us.

To some extent, *Poems From New Writing*, 1936-1946 decides on a taste already prepared by Mr. Lehmann's editorship during the years in question. It is one taste of several; a stronger and more varied choice could be made among writers off the list—including Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Andrew Young, Keyes, and several good lesser poets. Mr. Lehmann himself, of course, recognises the fact, indeed draws attention to it in a foreword. To accuse him, as some do, of organising a clique is both ungenerous and silly. Here, let us say, will be found a third or a quarter of the poetry going to make a period; and we discover, perhaps to our surprise, that some of the rare best of Auden, Edith Sitwell, Alun Lewis, Spender and MacNeice made an appearance under Mr. Lehmann. His particular school is led by Roy Fuller, Laurie Lee, Terence Tiller; reprinted, they show up very well. Demetrios Capetanakis was not only an unexpected and personal discovery, but a poet, if he had lived, possibly of genius. Over seventy names occur in the contributors' index, and they include the widely separated talents of Graves and Gascoyne, Henry Reed, Plomer, and (in translation), Leopardi, Aragon, Lorca. There is hardly, I think, an inferior poem in the book. In itself this anthology gives pleasure, as does everything well done, and it will take us one step towards realising the sum of poetry achieved in our time.

Poems about the war are beginning to be written in detachment. Whether the distance of time and space helps or not will depend partly on the writer and partly on our feelings about war poetry: the more the reconciliation provided in this case by art, the more as human beings we are likely to rebel. Both *The Lamp* and *The Soldier* are works of the imagination seeing from afar, giving indeed to remoteness a beauty and poignancy of its own. This isn't (says each blurb, in effect) "just" war poetry.

Mr. Church takes a piece of French territory that has associations for him (the Corot country), weaves an enchantment round a sunlit day in May, a barge sliding among the poplars, and denies the idyll of place with the time: period of Occupation. This is unhastily and beautifully contrived.

> . . . Time has no beginning there, no end.
> Green days, green nights commingle, each to each
> Mirrored in waters, was out of reach.
> Nobody moves except the folk who drift
> Half maritime, half gypsy, with a lift
> Of husky voices and a warning horn
> Aboard the barges . . .

A situation gathers: an old professor forced into accepting a German appointment, his daughter unwillingly falling in love at sight with a German captain; he and she meet a second time, on the bridge at night, and are shot by a jealous underling. There are hints of Eros and Psyche. The whole poem perhaps fails because fiction and legend don't mix, and because the frequent metrical changes produce a muffled effect of melodrama. Nevertheless, the spell of landscape, evoked with a Delius-like calm of rapture, remains.

Mr. Aiken's *The Soldier* plays philosophically (and not unfashionably) with time, preferring the Euphrates to East Coker. The long central dialogue between two soldiers at the time of Cyrus is vivid, and the whole poem urgent without offering much comfort or conclusion. Possibly war poetry should be barred to all except the very young (who take part) and the very old (too near death to care): those between are apt, rather helplessly, to feel too much.

Mr. Kenneth Patchen is introduced to us as the best of America's young poets. He convinces by flashes that he is a poet:

> The bloodhounds look like sad old judges
> In a strange court. They point their noses
> At the Negro jerking in the tight noose;
> His feet spread crow-like above these
> Honourable men who laugh as he chokes.
>
> I don't know this black man.
> I don't know these white men.
>
> But I know that one of my hands
> Is black, and one white . . .

Killing, sex, the city streets, legends of the sub-conscious, horror and pity in the face not only of war (at a remove), but of everything: these inspire an utterance at times magnificently sad or angry, but often obscured. His introducers seem to let their admiration for an attitude run

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away with them. Mr. Alex Comfort asserts that we cannot receive the impact of this poetry and "evaluate it at the same time." Why not? Mr Gascoyne rather inconsequently snatches at "the intransigence of the original Dada spirit," which is certainly not evident in the best of the poems printed here. I should agree with them that Mr. Patchen is a writer of quite remarkable force and originality. The time may even come when, expectorating less, he will express more.

More familiar attitudes . . . A Royal Academy of Poetry? Why not, with a yearly festival at the Gogglemore Hall, visits to Keats Grove and the Cheshire Cheese. Two of its most respected A.R.A.'s would be Dr. Gogarty and Dorothy Wellesley. Year after year would find them "sung," and we should all—bowler-hatted financiers, Cabinet Ministers, hostesses with a cause—make room in our lives for a Gogarty compliment or a Wellesley complaint. Here is the one, handing it out to apple-blossom, old friends, pubs, airmen, Irish villages, Leda, Yeats, and cutting familiar capers:

Oftentimes I wish that I
Were a glancing dragon fly:
That this bulk of brawn and bone
Instantly were off and gone
And I dancing on a beam
By a spring or little stream . . .

"Oh, the dear Doctor!"—a delighted bevy of admirers runs forward—"Isn't that so like him? A dragonfly, just fancy!—look, he's off again"—this time, perhaps, from an aeroplane, to gaze down "like a timeless god of old." The particular talent, that by mere repetition has become a trick, is Dr. Gogarty's off-hand way with the Greeks. There was a time when Dublin and Athens merged brightly enough, when pub-wit added its touch of slang to the Anthology. Now Orpheus and his gal, Leda going down to bathe (though "Mother told her not to") seem arch and little more.

Still, I prefer this to Dr. Gogarty's serious mood. "Do you remember that thrush at Glenasmole?" Such poetastry (delight of the Academician) clings also to the pieces in *Desert Wells*.

Far have I travelled in lands where the wild barley . . .
Nothing is here for pain, nothing for fear . . .
Be still, my soul, and let the fever pass . . .

This comes nearer the real thing than, say, Dr. Gogarty's elegy on Yeats, and despite the heavily gilt frames and time-honoured poses a number of pieces in *Desert Wells* appeal by their skill and feeling.

"One cannot read many lines of this book without feeling that one has entered a totally new world. Images of great strength and clarity project themselves . . ." So Mr. Arthur Waley—a voice rarely raised—introducing *Gold Khan and other Siberian Legends*. The recommendation is no less than just. These legends, chanted huskily round the fire in tents, have a power to cut away instantly the weight of emotion and thought we have come to expect of poetry.

The blood-red stallion comes there in the morning
stands there weeping till the evening.
When evening comes the horse runs on
through forty lands.
At the foot of a blue hill a blue sea surges.
At the blue hill's foot
at the blue sea's edge
Lives the great blue bull.
The blood-red stallion gallops to the blue bull's home . . .
The dewlap of that bull hangs on the ground
its mighty horns
Thrust in six places through the dappled clouds
and touch the sky . . .

Warriors, heroic children, swan-women, talking horses, spirits of good and evil whistle across the skies and clash in combat; and there are glimpses, behind this magic projection, of a nomad and pastoral life with its tents, herds, valleys and local chieftains. In war time, Mr. Cohn tracked down these legends through the work of German and Russian philologists, to their Turkic source, and seems to have made the perfect translation: one believes Mr. Waley's assurance that he has caught "exactly the style and rhythm that the poems require."

G. W. STONIER

A POSSE OF DETECTION

The Hollow. By AGATHA CHRISTIE. *Collins.* 8s. 6d.

The Case of the Dowager's Etchings. By RUFUS KING. *Methuen.* 7s. 6d.

Puzzle for Wantons. By PATRICK QUENTIN. *Gollancz.* 8s. 6d.

Death and the Pleasant Voices. By MARY FITT. *Michael Joseph.* 9s. 6d.

It Might Lead Anywhere. By E. R. PUNSHON. *Gollancz.* 8s. 6d.

The Corpse Grows a Beard. By MARGARET SCHERF. *Partridge.* 8s. 6d.

See You at the Morgue. By LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN. *Cassell.* 7s. 6d.

Selling's Murder. By ALFRED TACK. *Herbert Jenkins.* 8s. 6d.

Death for Madame. By R. T. CAMPBELL. *John Westhouse.* 8s. 6d.

Here Comes a Chopper. By GLADYS MITCHELL. *Michael Joseph.* 9s. 6d.

From London Far. By MICHAEL INNES. *Gollancz.* 8s. 6d.

Detection is growing more plentiful; but, after *The Hollow* there is nothing in the autumn list that a reviewer need dwell on. *The Hollow* has an elegantly symmetrical plot, cut to the Christie pattern. Poirot makes a statement at the end of this book, which might well stand as the cardinal principle of Mrs. Christie's technique. "There is only one thing to do if you want to clear a person from suspicion who is actually guilty. You must suggest guilt elsewhere but never localise it." In the context Poirot is not reproaching his maker for all the trouble she has given him for the last 25 years, as you might suppose. You must find out for yourselves whom he is addressing. For Mrs. Christie has taken one step further in the elaboration of her plots. She has been used to distribute suggestion of guilt herself from the author's control-tower overlooking the scene of action. In *The Hollow* she arranges for one of her characters to do the job for her. This is a masterly labour-saving contrivance, obviating the artificiality of her ordinary methods. Moreover, it frees Mrs. Christie from her preoccupation with balancing suspicion all round; and enables her to take far more pains with the plausibility of her characters. Among the house party at the Hollow, where the murder takes place, is a particularly well-drawn Harley Street doctor, and a delightfully unpredictable hostess. I have read many more dramatic and even more baffling detective stories by Mrs. Christie; but *The Hollow* proves that she may not even yet have reached the ultimate refinement of her art.

After the sheriff comes the posse, headed by an old favourite, Rufus King; riding that inferior animal Melodrama (by Rigmarole out of War Effort) with characteristic swagger. *The Case of the Dowager's Etchings* is the case of a patriotic old lady of Massachusetts offering lodgings in her ancestral home to munition-workers, and being rewarded with a body in her bushes. The reckless aberrations of the plot make a sorry contrast to the cool competence of the dialogue.

In *Puzzle for Wantons*, Peter and Iris Duluth run into another string of murders, this time in the vicinity of Reno. "I'm glad to say that, by and large, X had the lousiest luck of any ambitious murderer in history," declares Iris at the

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conclusion; but she is too flattering. The truth was that, with such brute imbecility at work, it was only by the lousiest luck that any one got murdered. With the Duluth combination Patrick Quentin abandons serious detection, and is content to hand out rollicking fun; ending, it is hoped, in a loud bang of surprise.

The pleasant voices in *Death and the Pleasant Voices* belong to an English county family into whose midst a callow medical student is projected, apparently, by accident. His business turns out to be the providing of a running commentary on murder, from an angle which enables Miss Fitt to mask her murderer. The point of Miss Fitt's detective novels is to be found in her character-drawing. But on this occasion her characters get beyond her control. This remarkable pleasant-voiced family swells from the remarkable to the outrageous, and finally topples over into the absurd. On the other hand, the plot has a nice twist to it, and is only marred by the confession thrown in to provide a solution.

It is impossible to enter into the complications of *It Might Lead Anywhere*. The title tells its own story; and it takes seven solid pages of type at the end for Bobby Owen to explain to his wife where it did lead. Mr. Punshon makes a speciality of these detective birds nests. It would be unfair to call them boring; but they are the most exhausting crimes I ever met. And when you breast the tape alongside Bobby Owen you may drop dead beat.

"If you like your dead bodies tossed about with a generous hand, this should be your meat." So runs the blurb of *The Corpse Grows a Beard*; but such an introduction does the book needless discredit. Miss Scherf, it is true, writes about murders in the light-hearted American vein; but her plot rests on a solid basis. A down-trodden husband, finding himself half-poisoned and then shot at, decides it is high time to disappear. Before his beard is fully grown he reads in the paper that his body has been washed ashore and been given decent burial. Here I hand over to Miss Scherf, who handles the poor fellow's posthumous adventures with great assurance.

See You at the Morgue introduces a novel method of detection—by bodily secretions. The moral appears to be that when a handkerchief lying beside a dead body is found to be imbued with your group of bodily secretions, then it's just too bad for you, if you haven't an alibi and Mr. Blochman decides to frame you.

High-pressure commercial travellers—speciality salesmen is the name they answer to—ply a hideous trade, even before they make things worse for themselves by knifing the managing director. In *Selling's Murder* Mr. Tack reveals the sordid details of the profession with the authenticity born of bitter personal experience. But even a speciality salesman would be hard put to sell the public such an old-fashioned model of amateur detection.

Mr. Campbell employs as a detective a professor of botany, who tries to outdo Mr. Carter Dixon's H.M. in facetious vocabulary and uninhibited personal habits. In *Death for Madame* the strangulation of a retired brothel-keeper in Bayswater is finally solved by the professor, after much humorous *recitatif*, by sheer intuition.

Miss Gladys Mitchell's style of surrealist detection is too fundamentally established to be criticised. In a misguided way she has a touch of genius. The first chapter of *Here Comes a Chopper* is as normal and readable as anyone could wish. Then comes a boy galloping along on a horse "like a Cyclops." Does Miss Mitchell really intend to say "Cyclops," or "Centaur"? That we shall never know, for there are no limits to her inconsequence. At any rate Mrs. Bradley soon steps in, and sees to it that we have much worse problems to worry over. Headless bodies, for instance; a Highland engine driver with second sight; scars made by a crocodile on a part of the body politely described as "a bim or semi-bim." And there is further tooth-work: a schoolboy catches a murderer in the act and gives him a good bite. The plot thickens to the consistency of meat paste (made of pure crocodile and other ingredients) and with a final twanging of bow-strings the villain is collared by a Rugby footballer and we can all go home, thanking Miss Mitchell for the pleasure of seeing her in such good fettle.

From London Far figures appropriately next to *Here Comes a Chopper*; but there is a thread of motive running through Michael Innes' wildest fantasy that puts him in a different category to Miss Mitchell. The casual intrusion of a literary don into a den of thieves starts the ball rolling. As there is a plot I say no more. But the book is called a thriller, and anyone who has read *The Daffodil Affair* knows what liberties Michael Innes allows himself under that heading.

After the posse come the *non possumus*. As I regard them as unreadable, it will be wiser not even to record their names.

RALPH PARTRIDGE

PÉGUY

Charles Péguy. By DANIEL HALÉVY. *Dennis Dobson.* 12s. 6d.

"Péguy," said Lavisse, "is a Catholic anarchist who has put holy water in his petrol." This is not at all the tone of M. Halévy's life of the poet. Perhaps it is his great affection for his friend and colleague which has made it easy to write in that tone of rhetorical adulation with which we have grown unfamiliar in England. And full-dress processional qualities of his style are thrown into still higher relief by the sudden and unwarranted colloquialisms of the translation.

Péguy has always been considered paradoxical, to many French people he is less a poet than a cult, saint-like, miraculous. Romain Rolland, whose *Jean-Christophe* Péguy discovered and published, piece by piece, in his *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, and whose two volume life is probably the best work on the poet, tells us that all Péguy's friends took a different view of him according to temperament.

> One sees in Péguy the Catholic, another the heretic, the third a free thinker, a fourth the soldier of the Republic, and another the forerunner of heaven knows what National Socialism. What haven't they made of him? His own son . . . celebrated him as the inspired prophet of the National Revolution in Vichy. . . . Oh, dear, oh, dear! . . . No one lets (the dead) sleep in peace. Each one enlists them in his service.

And Rolland adds that "hardly had the false revolution subsided than French patriots went to Péguy for weapons to use against Marshal Pétain." We are reminded that Vercors in the *Editions de Minuit* published *Deux Voix Françaises, Charles Péguy, Gabriel Peri*, in which he "associated fraternally our Péguy with a chief and a martyr of French communism."

Péguy has always been a controversial figure, religious yet anticlerical, extremely nationalistic yet the opposite of reactionary, patriotic but a believer in the universal brotherhood, he was the son of a peasant, and his early life in Orleans seems not unlike the early life of Hans Andersen in Odense. A medieval Catholic, almost a pre-Reformation Christian. Typically his first great work was a *Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc*, equally typically it is dedicated:—

> To all men and women who will have lived their human lives,
> To all men and women who will have died their human deaths,
> To establish the universal socialist republic.

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